PRIVATE EYE

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23 March –
5 April 2001
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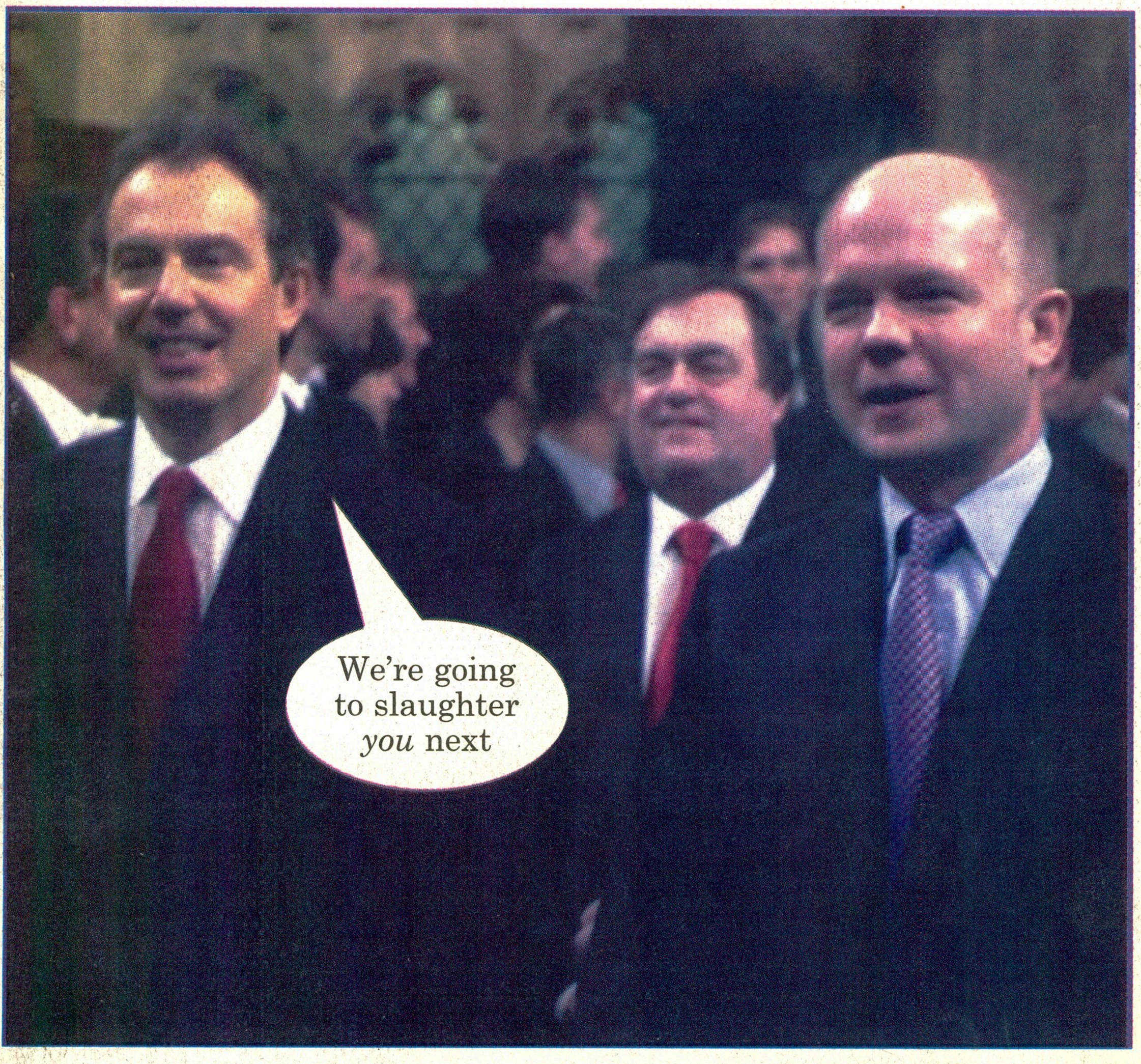
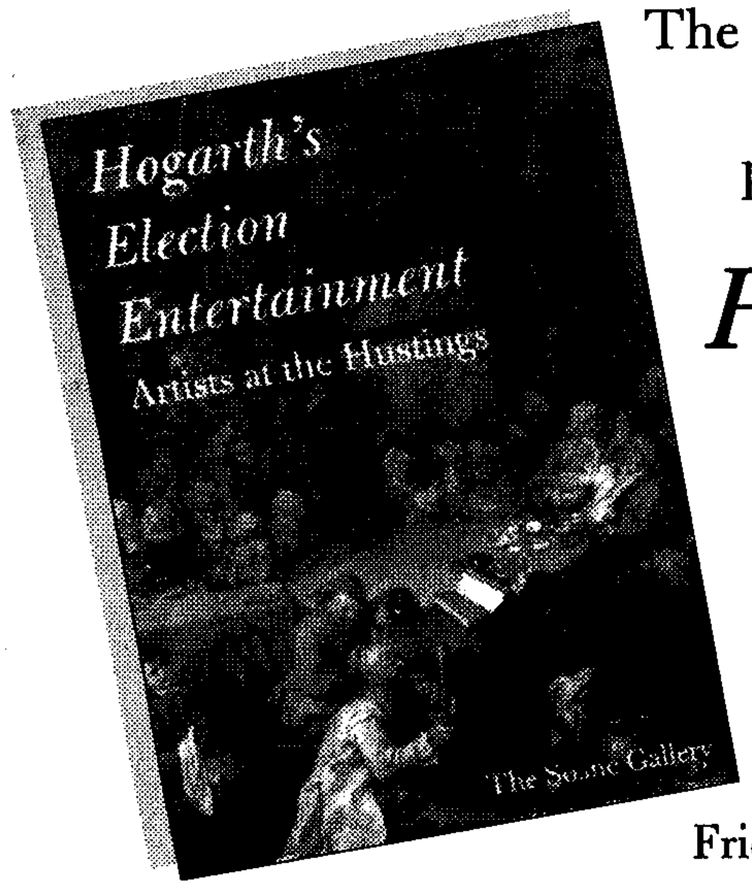
FOOT AND MOUTH
NEW CULL SHOCK





The Sir John Soane Museum in association
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present the forthcoming exhibition

Hogarth's Election Entertainment

Artists at the Hustings

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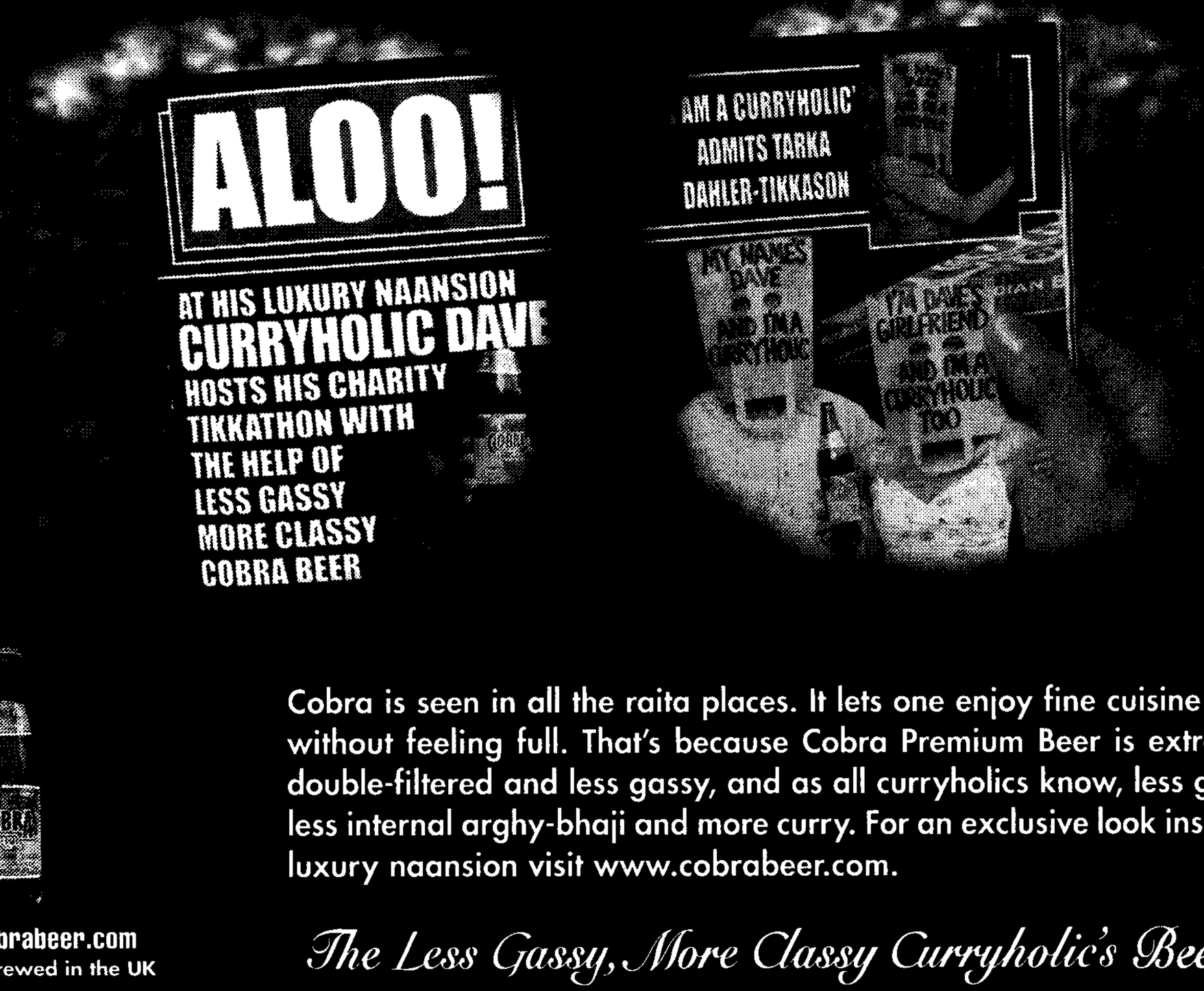

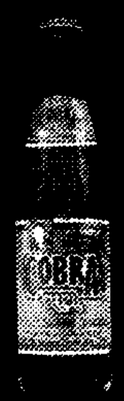

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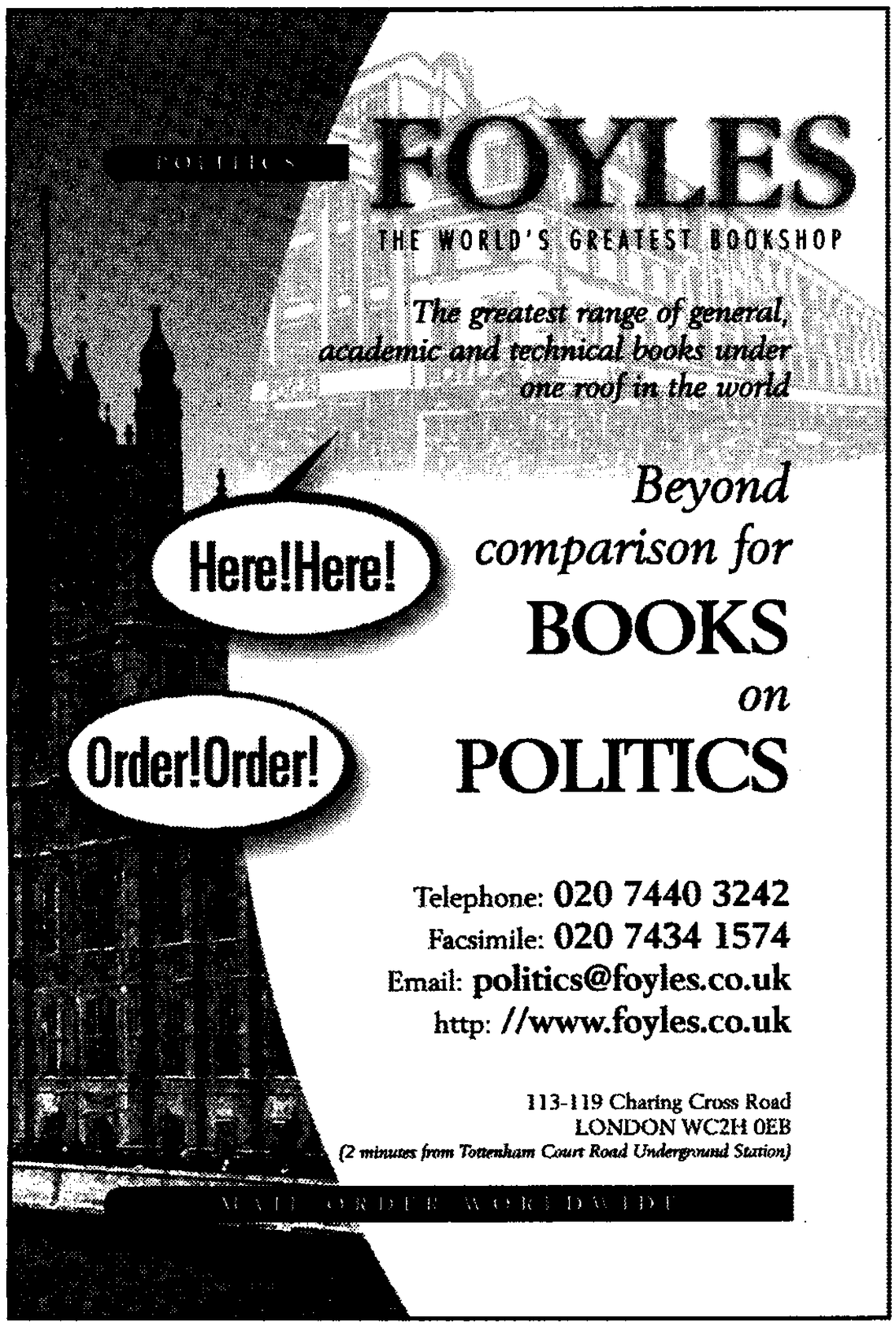

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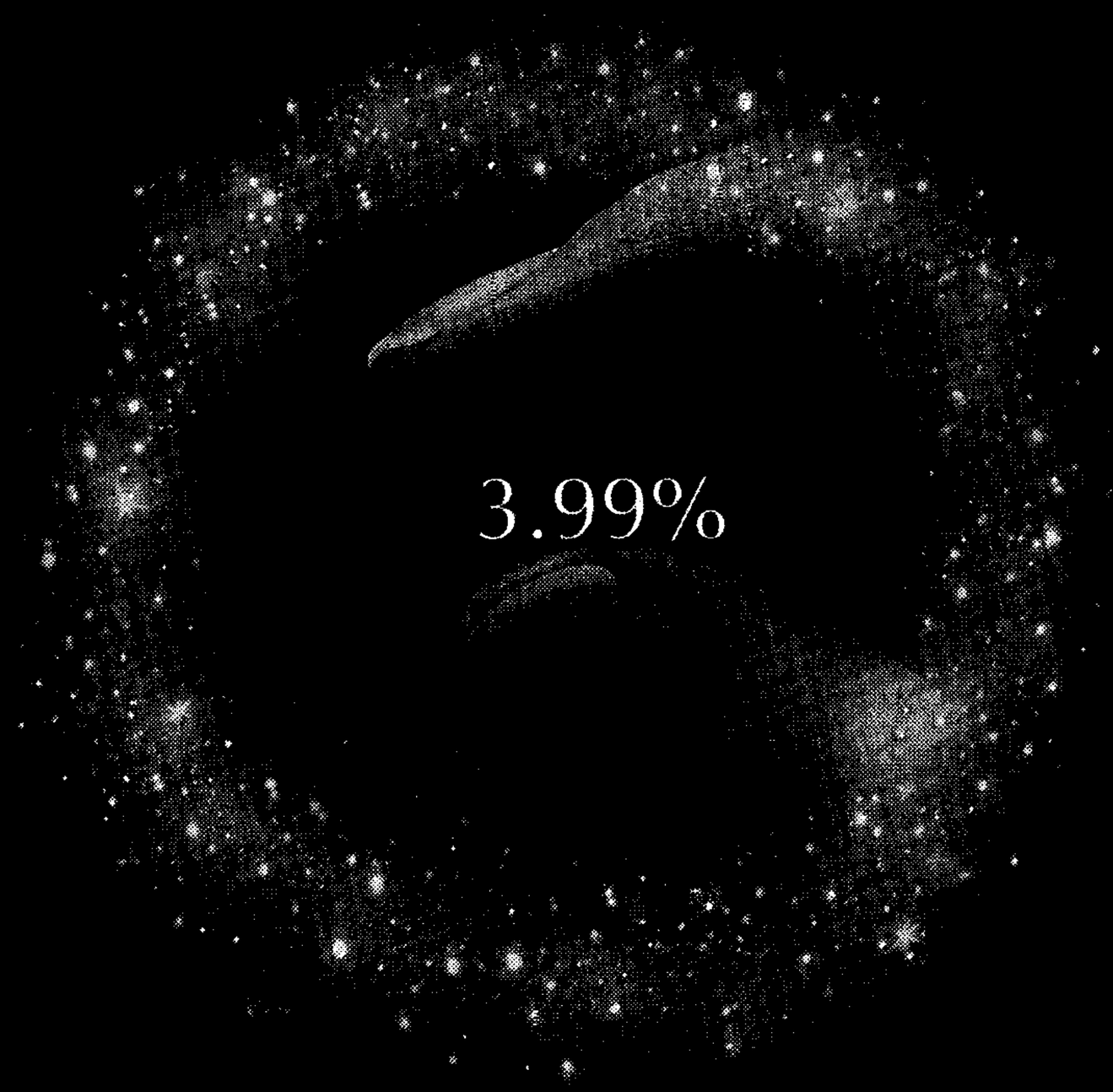

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PE23/3/01

Gnome

A Letter From Lord Gnome to the Editor of the Spectaki (prop. Lord Gnome)

Dear Sir,

I am absolutely appalled by the sort of people who work for my magazine. To take only one example, the column "A Taki Driver Writes", by Mr Takalotofcokeupthenos (Cab No. 7324) is consistently racist, anti-semitic and deeply offensive to my wife Lady Barbara Gnomiel.

What kind of proprietor allows such degraded filth to be published in his own journals?

If I were me, I would give this so-called cab driver – or rather propagandist of the lunatic right – an invitation to dinner.

I will be writing to you again tomorrow, so please leave a very large space for a long letter attacking myself.

Yours,
CONRAD GNOME,

The Asylum, Canary Ward,
Barking MAD 1.

"Am I allowed to go to the country?"

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WHAT was it exactly that Sir Anthony Hammond discovered about the Hinduja brothers but felt unable to expand upon in his recent whitewash?

The strangest passage in his report refers to the brothers' possible involvement in "a number of dubious practices, in some cases potentially amounting to illegal activities", not confined to the Bofors gun scandal in India..

This suggests Hammond may well have been in touch with MI6, which warned the former Tory government about the Hindujas ten years ago. MI6 work very closely with Kroll Associates, the high-powered (and amazingly expensive) international research organisation which specialises in security matters.

Some years after the MI6 investigation, Kroll was hired by the British bank Flemings to produce a report on the Hindujas to help Flemings decide whether it should team up with the Hindujas in a financial venture in India. The Kroll report, most of which was conveyed by word of mouth, gave a long and detailed account of the Hindujas' various financial escapades in Iran under the Shah.

Their father, a foreign exchange dealer from Sind, had an office in Bombay. He sent his sons to Teheran when he opened a branch of his business there. They relished the "anything goes" atmosphere of financial freedom which the shah encouraged and engaged enthusiastically in many of the not altogether straightforward ventures of the time. They were involved for instance in the Saudi European bank, a spectacular ruse masterminded from Paris by Jamal Redwan. It duly collapsed.

As revolution threatened the shah, the Hindujas rapidly made arrangements to handle the affairs of many of Teheran's top people, and hopped it to the safety of London. There they were joined by several once-important Iranian exiles, including Khodadad Farman Farmayan, a former governor of the Central Bank of Iran, and Maria Emani, a niece of the former Iranian foreign minister. Farmayan is now managing director of the Hindujas foundation and Emani is married to a Hinduja.

In the best tradition set by Robert Maxwell and other prominent British businessmen, the Hindujas liked to surround themselves with former diplomats. In 1986 Hugh Carless CMG, a former British ambassador in Venezuela, became executive vice-president of the Hinduja Foundation.

Among the matters disclosed to Flemings by Kroll was the extent of the funds which ended up in the Hindujas' control, including at least some access to a fortune donated under the shah's regime to the Shrine at Meshed. These funds were charitably donated as "alms". This establishes the Hindujas as the first-ever internationally renowned alms dealers.

After listening to Kroll's investigators, Flemings decided immediately not to proceed any further with the suggested project.

The Hindujas' adoration of important people was well illustrated by the Christmas card they sent out last December to leading supporters and colleagues all over Britain. The card contained a CD Rom of all the wonderful projects sponsored by the brothers. A tempting attraction of the CD Rom was advertised on the front of the card – "a special message from Tony and Cherie Blair".

WHILE papers such as the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* work themselves into a frenzy of indignation about Keith Vaz's links with solicitor Sarosh Zaiwalla, the Tories seem curiously muted on the subject. Why should this be?

Although he specialises in the unglamorous field of marine arbitration, Zaiwalla's assiduous socialising has brought him many contacts in Westminster – almost all of them Tories.

At his old offices in Chancery Lane in the 1990s, colleagues were awestruck by the number of VIPs who accepted invitations to his Christmas party, including the then lord chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern. Zaiwalla was also vice-president of the Durbar Club, which raised funds for the Tories from Asian businessmen. In February 1988, at a Durbar party held in 12 Downing Street by the then chief whip David Waddington, he mingled with Sir Geoffrey Howe, Peter Brooke, John Patten, Chris Patten and Denis Thatcher.

In November 1991 Zaiwalla helped organise a dinner at 10 Downing Street to celebrate John Major's first anniversary as prime minister – and to fill Tory coffers in time for the general election. Also present – surprise! – were the Hundujas. His craving for publicity reached ludicrous new heights in July 1995, following John Major's defeat of John Redwood, when Zaiwalla issued a press release announcing that he had sent letters of congratulation to Major, Michael Heseltine and Malcolm Rifkind "on the recent events in British politics".

Another of his networking schemes is the Asian Business Breakfast Club, which he set up in March 1998 with the Tory MP for Banbury, Tony Baldry. The involvement of Baldry, who earned more than £30,000 a year in barrister's fees from Zaiwalla & Co, gave Zaiwalla privileged access to Westminster: the club was launched with a party at the House of Commons attended by Keith Vaz, the Hinduja brothers and other such eminences. But who was the guest of honour? Step forward William Hague.

Hence the Tories' problem: any mud they fling is likely to be hurled straight back at them. Parliamentary standards commissioner Elizabeth Filkin's report last week rebuked Vaz for recommending Sarosh Zaiwalla for an honour without declaring that he had received payments from the solicitor (whom he jokingly addressed as "Lord Zaiwalla"). Sounds familiar? It is only a year since Tony Baldry MP had to apologise to the House for nominating Zaiwalla for a CBE but failing to mention that he had previously accepted a £5,000 loan from him.

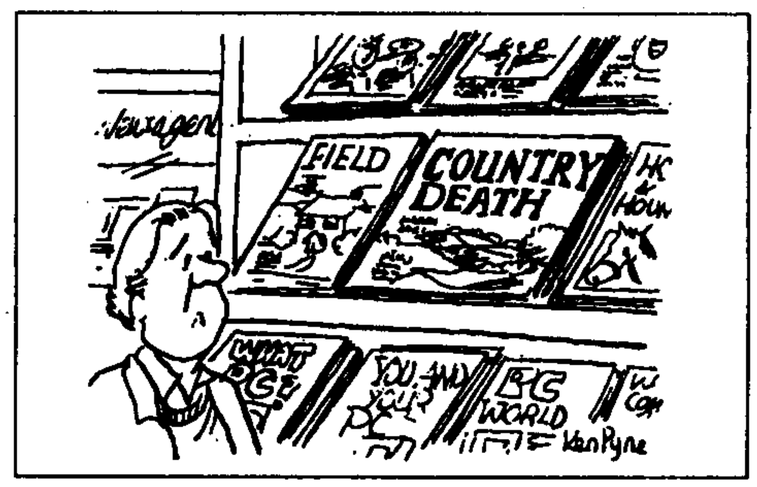
Baldry had twice assured the Conservative chairman Michael Ancram, and Filkin, that he never recommended Zaiwalla for an honour. Despite this untruth (which Baldry attributed to a bad memory), Ancram refused to ask the party's ethics committee to consider the MP's conduct. So Hague can hardly now accuse Blair of being "soft on sleaze".

Besides, how can he mention "sleaze" in the same breath as Sarosh Zaiwalla, who is an upright citizen and lifelong Conservative? Look at the identity of the distinguished barrister who accompanied and advised Zaiwalla when he appeared before Elizabeth Filkin: Edward Garnier QC – otherwise known as the Tory MP for Market Harborough and shadow attorney-general.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The report speaks for itself. It's a very good report. It's a very long report. I haven't read the report yet."

— *Keith Vaz,* BBC World at One, *talking about the Hammond report into the Hinduja passport affair*



NEWS

JUST weeks after London Underground train drivers went on strike over their concerns about safety on the tube in the event of a public private partnership, details of a poisonous gas leak at a London tube station were kept hidden from the public.

London Underground staff at Southwark station had been aware of a funny smell for a couple of weeks when they discovered on 8 March that it was coming from a build up of hydrogen sulphide, the result of a broken pump in the drainage system. The station was immediately evacuated, but despite the fact that anyone exposed to the gas is advised to seek medical attention, no public statement was made regarding the incident. London Underground claims the level of hydrogen sulphide was not dangerous, but this does not explain why as soon as the station was closed, all of its own staff were taken to hospital for a check-up.

DEREK WYATT, MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and chairman of the parliamentary internet group, may have a passion for computers, but they have not brought him much luck in his career so far.

The collapse of the World Internet Forum, a political web "summit" set up by Wyatt two years ago, leaving debts of £830,000, is not the first time his digital dreams have come to nought. The failure of WIF to sign up a predicted 500 delegates to its first three-day forum last November sounded all too familiar to those involved in Haringey council's doomed £100,000 millennium bid to turn Alexandra Palace into "the centre of the European information highway".

Wyatt, at the time a Labour councillor in Haringey and the chair of the Ally Pally trustees, masterminded this attempt to create "the first digital library for the UK on a par to the British Library". Sadly, the bid failed, leaving the Ally Pally charity and Haringey council facing a £50m debt.

Wyatt was sharply criticised in the ensuing district auditor's report which questioned why he had spent £100,000 on the bid, including trips to the Tory party conference and to Paris, when the board of trustees had only authorised £5,000. He was no longer around to take the flak by this time, however, having already departed for pastures new at Westminster, cue his latest ill-fated project.

ROBIN JEFFREY, chairman designate of British Energy, must be rubbing his hands in glee at the latest nuclear offensive by the energy industry's favourite journalist, Mary Fagan in the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Fagan reported that the energy giant is planning to build seven new nuclear plants, a far cry from 1995 when it said it was scrapping any plans for new power stations, with possible locations including Hunterston in Scotland, Dungeness in Kent and Hinkley in Somerset.

The industry regulator, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII), told the *Eye* that the story might have been more interesting had there been a shred of evidence to support it. To date British Energy has not presented any proposals to the NII, which is responsible for licensing new plants.

Furthermore, Labour stated in its 1997 election manifesto that it did not see the case for building any new nuclear power stations. The cost of building the last new nuclear plant, Sizewell B, in 1994 was £2bn, a sum the City is unlikely to stump up and that is simply not available in the public sector.

Regardless of the facts, news of British Energy's plans has probably gone down well with shareholders, who have been putting the company under increasing pressure after the share price plummeted from an £8 high two years ago to little over £2 at the end of last month.

CHERIE BOOTH QC was due to host a party at Matrix Chambers this week on behalf of Liberty, the civil rights pressure group. We trust that no guest was indelicate enough to remind her that Liberty's general secretary John Wadham is the lawyer for David Shayler – whom Cherie's freedom-loving husband is currently seeking to imprison for blowing the whistle on incompetence and illegality in the security services.

We must also hope that no one tried taunting Nicholas Blake QC, a prominent "human rights" barrister who set up Matrix Chambers with Cherie, about his trip to Fiji. As the *Eye* first revealed, he recently accepted a large brief fee to defend the racist, military-backed government against a case brought by a poor Indo-Fijian sugar farmer who claimed that the suspension of the multi-racial constitution was illegal.

Blake is very sensitive on this subject and told the British media "it is never healthy for the rule of law for lawyers to be criticised for doing their job".

Now that the *Eye* has obtained court transcripts and documents from Fiji, we can see just what a splendid job he did. The man from Matrix thought he knew more about human rights than mere Fijians, or indeed Amnesty International but, alas, the five judges of the Fijian appeal court were none too impressed. They ruled that both the regime and its abrogation of the constitution were illegal.

Number crunching

£200,000

■ Compensation awarded for stress to honey-trap policewoman in Rachel Nickell murder case

£20,000

■ Criminal injuries compensation offered to Nickell's two-year-old son, Alex, who witnessed his mother's murder

£20,000

■ Awarded to mother who gave birth to triplets instead of twins following IVF treatment

Street of Shame

VANESSA Feltz clearly thinks highly of Richard Desmond: why else would she have been so eager to accept his offer of a regular column in the *Express*? So we trust she won't be distressed to learn that some mischief-maker is using her internet domain name to flog Dirty Des's pornography.

Browsers who enter the site www.vanessafeltz.co.uk are confronted by a huge pair of naked breasts and the front cover of *Readers' Wives*, along with the exhortation "Buy Your British Porno Mags Now!" A further click brings up a list of other delights which can be ordered from British Magazines Direct by post, including old Desmond favourites such as *Asian Babes*, *50 and Over* and *Best of Big Ones*.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Sport Focus apologises for getting its wires crossed last week, and would like to make the following correction to "Quote of the Week":-

Saddam Hussain is not the England Cricket Captain – He is Captain of Iraq.
We meant to say "Nasser Hussein".

***TRIBUNE*'S thrash for Michael Foot at the paper's new HQ in the baronial Hampstead pile owned by train drivers' union Aslef was already a lively affair before the sudden and frequent interventions of a persistent heckler.**

Even as Messrs Robin Cook, Diane Abbott and Tony Banks vainly attempted to make themselves heard above the din of crashing beer bottles, they had to contend with frequent interruptions. The verbal firestorm included: "Get off"; "Sit-down"; and "That's enough"; and it continued until a particularly well-built steelworker from Foot's old Ebbw Vale constituency told the miscreant: "One more f*****g chance mate!"

Faced by a human wall of proletarian muscle, the mystery heckler shut up. But who was the mystery man? Step forward the ever so slightly tired and emotional John McEntee, alias William Hickey from Dirty Des's *Daily Sexpress*!

FOOT AND MOUTH was a heaven-sent opportunity for the *Daily Telegraph* to reaffirm its status as the voice of the beleaguered countryside dweller.

Instead of relying on pontificating hacks who live in north London, the *Daily Wellygraph* has been going straight to the horse's mouth, as it were, to commission first-hand accounts of the distress of "real" country folk.

Such as, on 12 March, the page which featured articles on how the crisis has affected the tourist industry by a typical Cornish B&B owner, Gill Charlton, and a Lake District hotelier, Charles Garside. There was evidently not enough space to include the fact that Ms Charlton is a former travel editor of the *Daily Torygraph*, while Mr Garside bought the agreeable Miller Howe hotel on the shore of Lake Windermere after twice being removed as editor of the *European* and receiving magnificent payoffs. Better an ex-hack than no hack at all!

TABOO OR NOT TABOO

"CHILD pornography is disgusting," Polly Toynbee revealed in the *Guardian* last week. "Maybe the next Emins will win prizes tilting at this last taboo." Oddly enough, on 3 Sept 1998 the same Polly Toynbee claimed that income tax rises were the "last taboo". But then, as *Grauniad* readers must sometimes ask themselves, what isn't?

"TV breaks last taboo with scenes of man dying of cancer."
— Kamal Ahmed, *Guardian*, 19 March 1998

"A woman eating chocolate on the underground is one of the last taboos. "
— Emma Forrest, *Guardian*, 11 May 1998

"*The Bill*... is preparing for an assault on one of the last taboos. It is sneaking in a lesbian love scene."
— Claire Armitstead, *Guardian*, 19 January 1999

"Virginity... the new last taboo."
— Fraser MacDonald, *Guardian*, 18 February 1999

"Male rape... the last taboo."
— Kate Hilpern and Emma Williams, *Guardian*, 3 March 1999

"The curse of the curse. What is it with periods? Victoria Coren tackles the last taboo."
— *Guardian*, 7 June 1999

"Mental illness is one of the last taboos, even though it afflicts one in four."
— Hilary Freeman, *Guardian*, 4 September 1999

"The monarchy is the last taboo in Britain."
— Tony Wright MP, *Guardian*, 28 June 2000

"We are running out of space to bury the dead... professionals will argue that it is time to break one of the last taboos – and begin to reuse existing graves."
— Oliver Burkeman, *Guardian*, 2 September 2000

"Is female masturbation still the last taboo?"
— Rowan Pelling, *Guardian*, 21 November 2000

"The fact is, discussing salary in public remains football's last taboo."
— Jim White, *Guardian*, 25 November 2000

"The Last Taboo. Tierney Gearon on why her photographs are not pornographic."
— Cover of G2, *Guardian*, 13 March 2001

Wot, no cannibalism?

MIRROR IMAGE

"MANDELSON had to go. Because he was Mandelson. A man with a dodgy image." Thus the main editorial in the *Daily Mirror* on 10 March, the morning after the Hammond report on the Hinduja affair – apparently overlooking the fact that *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan has an image every bit as dodgy as Mandelson.

No wonder Mandy and his few remaining friends feel more bitter about the *Mirror*'s gleeful coverage of his downfall than about any other paper, right or left. No wonder, too, that they are starting to whisper that the Prince of Darkness could, if he chose, reveal a great deal about Moron's desperate lobbying of his cronies at No 10, Ally and Tony, to help save his skin over the Slickergate scandal – a desperation reflected in the lapdog loyalty that Moron's paper now displays to Blair and Campbell.

By happy irony, Moron's editorial defending the sacking of "dodgy" Mandelson appeared on the same day as the *Times*'s revelation that the DTI's Slickergate probe was now investigating meetings between *Mirror* hacks and City traders at the lap-dancing establishment owned by Peter Stringfellow, a chum of both the Slickers and Moron. The news merely served to emphasise both the seediness of the whole saga and the dismal failure of the Trinity Mirror board to take action against its discredited editor.

But according to rumours in the City and Canary Wharf, Moron may be living on borrowed time. Such is the decline in the *Mirror*'s circulation and editorial credibility over the past year that chairman Sir Victor Blank is being urged by some colleagues to dump Moron soon after the election – and before the DTI publishes its findings. As one senior *Mirror* executive explained to City chums over a drink the other night: "If Piers goes before a damning DTI report comes out, it might just contain the damage enough to save anyone more senior from having to walk the plank."

The luckless Mandelson may find this scenario eerily familiar.

PS: The *Mirror* ran a thoughtful editorial last week on the plummeting stock market. "What is happening and why?" it asked. "The answer is that the whiz-kids of the City were too greedy and eager to back telecom and hi-tech shares. They pushed them up to a ridiculous level which they could never maintain. The result has been disaster for those investors who dabbled. There is a serious lesson in this. The stock market is not a gambling den. People's savings and pensions depend on it."

Could this by any chance include the savings of *Mirror* readers who disastrously heeded the advice of Piers Moron's beloved City Slickers to "fill yer boots" with hi-tech shares?

FOLLOWING James Hipwell's letter in the last *Eye*, old Fleet Street hands urge Lord Gnome to ponder the "wider implications" of Hipwell's emergence on the payroll of Max Clifford, king of kiss 'n' tell and official mouthpiece for Mohamed Fayed. Extensive pondering duly throws up a fascinating number of common denominators and overlapping connections.

At the *News of the Screws* and then the *Mirror*, Piers Morgan poured more money into Max Clifford's coffers than any other editor. So Max has a vested interest in Moron's survival. Lo and behold, Max's new employee Hipwell is now said to be less enthusiastic than his fellow-Slicker Anil Bhoyrul about grassing-up Morgan to DTI investigators.

It's an open secret among former *Punch* staff that the decision to give Hipwell and Bhoyrul a berth at the magazine following their sacking from the *Mirror* was a favour Fayed did for Moron, who was desperate to keep the Slickers happy and stop them blabbing too much. Moron had earned Fayed's gratitude by running countless puff stories backing the Pharaoh's mad conspiracy theories about Diana 'n' Dodi, and had run an editorial hailing Chairman Mo as a national hero after the Neil Hamilton libel case. When even Fayed recognised that the Slickers column was doing *Punch* no favours and dropped it, who should throw Hipwell a lifebelt but Clifford, a friend of both Moron and Mo. Keep it in the family, so to speak.

Meanwhile there was the problem of Bhoyrul. Whereupon another character enters the dramatis personae of this back-watching, back-patting and even back-stabbing plot. Kelvin MacKenzie – a friend of Morgan, the Slickers, Fayed and Clifford – intervened to persuade another pal, Richard Desmond, to hire Anil Bhoyrul as City editor of the *Daily Star*. After objections from *Star* editor Peter Hill the appointment is now officially "on hold" until the DTI decides whether to recommend any of the Slickergate brigade for prosecution.

Why should MacKenzie do such a favour for a disgraced hack? Well, it was Kelvin who recommended Piers Morgan for the *Mirror* editorship, and who then advised him to hire Hipwell and Bhoyrul. (As a director of the Mirror Group, MacFrenzy was also involved in a "share club" for senior executives.) Now that he is head of a public company, the Wireless Group, could it be that MacKenzie wishes to minimise the fallout from the Slicker affair?

In yet another twist to this convoluted tale, rumours persist that MacKenzie and his mate Fayed, long a frustrated wannabe press baron, are secretly discussing a possible tie-up with their friend Desmond to rescue the *Express*. No doubt it is pure coincidence that the *Express* titles have suddenly started offering Harrods-related prizes in competitions – and that in the latest issue of *Punch* the Phoney Pharaoh hailed Dirty Des as the only decent, people-championing newspaper owner in Britain!

HACKWATCH

Tony Parsons

MUSING on the difference between the sexes recently, Tony Parsons wrote that women have become more like men "and it has been a disaster for them". Meanwhile, men have become more like women, "and it has been good for them". But he failed to mention the most striking example of the latter: through his *Daily Mirror* column, the gorgeous pouting Parsons has established himself as the first male Glenda Slagg...

18 December 2000: "The BBC is reportedly introducing an initiative to keep plain and plug ugly reporters off the box," Parsons notes. "Good. There are already too many of Mother Nature's face-aches on BBC TV." Look at Charlie Dimmock: she's got a "body like a sack of organic fertiliser and a face to match... If my dog had a face like Charlie Dimmock, I would shave its bottom and teach it to walk backwards."

1 January 2001: Here she is, Tony's New Year nookie-magnet! It's Connie, the woman in the adverts for Internet firm AOL. "Those innocent, wide-set eyes. That rosebud mouth. That adorable bell of chestnut hair. Her slim, leggy body... She can double-click on my mouse any time she likes." Geddit!?!

8 January: Princess Margaret – don'tcha hate her? "The only constants in the blindingly mediocre life of Princess Margaret would appear to be privilege, illness and lashings of alcohol." Elsewhere in the column, Tony tries his hand at humour: "The mother who wanted to give her daughter breast implants for her 16th birthday present certainly has her knockers... If Kay had given her daughter breast implants, that would have made three enormous great boobs living under one roof." Hilarious! But Tony has a serious and profound point to make: "Breasts are a lot like love and Louis Vuitton bags. It's important to know the difference between the real thing and the phoney. But sometimes it's difficult to tell."

15 January: Harrison Ford – don'tcha hate him? "Ford hasn't made a half-decent film for donkey's years. These days most of his energies go into his mid-life crisis, which has been blossoming nicely since he split from his wife Melissa last October." And how about Princess Anne!? A "cold, mean-spirited sourpuss" and a "hideous old boot". And Kate Winslet?!? "She sure does whine about her weight... Get on your exercise bike and stop moaning, Kate. Or there's always a sequel to *Free Willy*."

29 January: Tony delivers his considered verdict on the government. Robin Cook: "Spectacularly second-rate." John Prescott: "Fat moron." But why waste breath on them when one can attack a royal instead? "That hard, heartless face... those cold, loveless eyes... that vicious woman's mouth all twisted with spite and loathing." Yup, he's talking about Princess Anne, stoopid!?!

5 February: Rory McGrath and Ian Hislop – don'tcha hate 'em? "Both men are flabby, multi-chinned little trolls who have turned spitting bile into a vocation... Why are the men who make a living out of mocking others always small, stunted little trolls?"

12 February: "My fame is on a very, very modest level," Tony admits, modestly. "But although I am very much a B-list celebrity... I have been around enough true superstars to know a bit about the pressures of fame." So give Naomi Campbell a break, Mister Paparazzo! "Campbell made herself look ridiculous by shrieking about the revelation that she attends Narcotics Anonymous and then smiling for the cameras just a few days later when she had something to sell. But this is not hypocrisy. This is human nature. We all want to be loved. But we also want to be left alone." Quite so: don'tcha hate gutter newspapers which add to the pressures of fame by tormenting celebrities?!?

19 February: That silly cow Meg Mathews "has spent £17,000 of Noel Gallagher's money" on liposuction, breast-jobs, thigh-jobs and Botox injections. "Meg is fast turning into the Imelda Marcos of cosmetic surgery. Imelda spent a fortune on shoes. Meg spends a fortune on trying to look less like an old boot. I have nothing but admiration for a woman who blows seventeen grand on making herself beautiful. But when does it start working?"

26 February: Boris Becker's new girlfriend, rap singer Sabrina Setlur, is seeking £300,000 in damages from a German magazine which printed topless photos of her. "For what?" Tony demands furiously. "Hurt feelings? Violation of that no-nipples contract? Looking like a silly slapper who'd do anything for a scrap of publicity?" Sabrina should quit a-pouting and a-shouting, "and in future keep her vest on and her mouth shut".

5 March: Boozy young women – don'tcha hate 'em?! "Loud, stupid, obnoxious, a rabble who seem to make this world a nastier place just by their presence." Tony met a posse of them on a plane back from Iceland, and "what I noticed most about those slappers coming home from Reykjavik is that they were a man-free zone". Most blokes, he reckons, would rather masturbate than go to bed with bints like these. Tony gives more details of his own taste in slappers elsewhere on the page. "It's official — hot pants are back," he drools. "Friday's *Mirror* pictured a leggy, small-breasted model prowling down a Milan catwalk with her modesty covered by a thin sliver of something highly inflammable... I almost choked on my Coco Pops."

12 March: Russell Crowe – what a wimp, a-quakin' and a-shakin' at the news that there's been a threat to kidnap him. And, Tony argues, "it's good for the rest of us to smell his fear. Because heroes are becoming a lot like love or Louis Vuitton bags. Increasingly we can't tell the difference between the fake and the real thing." *(You've done this already. Ed.)* Meanwhile, Parsons mourns the deaths of John Diamond and Auberon Waugh. "But you would never guess from the outpourings of grief that followed their deaths that journalism is largely populated by cruel, stupid cowards." Take Caitlin Moran, a "fat" and "silly" hackette on *The Times* who had the nerve to criticise Tony's pal Michael Parkinson. And A. A. Gill, who "makes a living out of spitting bile" . And that "mediocre little troll" Ian Hislop. "I look forward to dancing on their graves," Tony rages. "These creeps trade in misery, abuse and sneering. That's what they do for a living."

Unlike dear old Glenda Parsons, of course.

(For some reason I think this is the finest Hackwatch the Eye has ever printed. Ed.)

"I only really get upset if she brings dead birds in"

POLITICAL scientists and historians wishing to chronicle the rise of "new" Labour are urged to contact Charlie Whelan, who is always happy to do his bit for scholarship.

A couple of weeks ago Whelan received a long letter from a student at London University who was writing a dissertation on the Third Way, social democracy and so forth. "You were involved heavily in the 1997 election campaign 'war room', according to Philip Gould's excellent book," the student wrote, "and it was from here that yourself, Campbell, Mandelson, Irvine and Blair, among others, adopted the Third Way into Labour… What does the Third Way mean personally to you?"

Whelan's thoughtful reply, complete with "old Labour" spelling and punctuation, was as follows: "I've never read Goulds book. I Havn't a clue what he did in the election except go to focus groups. As for thr 'Third Way' I thonk it's bollocks. Love Charlie."

IMPORTANT news from the Polish press: "Aktem skruchy byly odwiedziny Borisa Johnson, redaktora naczelnego tygodnika *Spectator*…"

There is much more in the same vein, announcing the glad tidings that Boris Johnson has made a penitential pilgrimage to Fawley Court, aka "Poland-on-Thames", the Oxfordshire estate which houses a Polish religious order called the Marian Fathers.

As the daily *Dziennik Polski* reports, Boris had come to apologise for the behaviour of his colleague Petronella Wyatt, who wrote a piece in the *Spectator* last September claiming that Fawley Court "looked like an inverted bus shelter", that its resident monks "dress like narcotics abusers" – and, more generally, that a list of Polish achievements "would not cover a cheeseboard".

The piece provoked a deluge of complaints from Poles and Catholics, including the Duke of Norfolk. A contrite Boris had to write dozens of letters of apology, and now he has been to Fawley Court to abase himself. "A marvellous place," he gushed. "I cannot agree with the criticisms expressed in the article and the picture painted by Petronella Wyatt of Fawley Court and the Polish community."

Heaven always rejoices at sinners who repent. And the *Spectator* editor's desire to grovel to the local Polish community is, of course, entirely unrelated to the fact that Fawley Court is in the parliamentary constituency of Henley, whose prospective Tory candidate is a certain Boris Johnson.

NOT all Labour backbenchers are quite so enthusiastic as Tony Blair about a May election, it seems.

"We need to swing into action pretty quickly," Austin Mitchell MP warns in a letter to his local party members. "Our first task is to revive the Grimsby Labour Party. Membership has been falling, activity slowing, apathy increasing…"

It gets gloomier. As Mitchell admits, May 1997 was a doddle because everyone hated the Tories. "This time that will be weaker and our problems will be apathy, alienation and, among our own supporters, the feeling that Labour hasn't done enough for them. Quite honestly we haven't. Yet… Please do help. Your party needs you. So do I."

Just how much help he needs is revealed by a forlorn PS: "As we're bankrupt, any donations will be gratefully received."

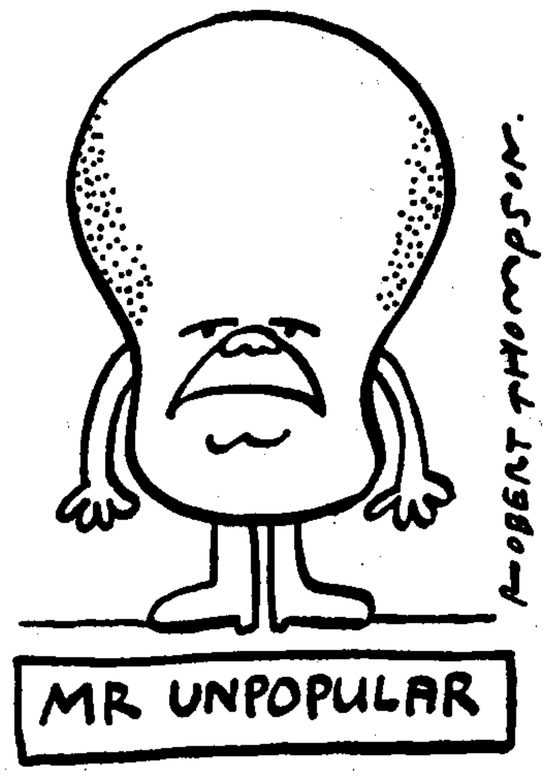
THE recent memorial service for Caroline Benn in St Mary's Church, Westminster, was enlivened by liberal references to "socialism" and the rendition of the *Internationale* as guests – including home secretary Jack Straw – trooped from the service.

One attendee was so taken by the Old Labour-style gathering that she announced to friends it was "Nice to hear language that we can't use anymore". And who was she? Step forward Fiona Millar, partner of the fearsome Alastair Campbell, otherwise known as the prime minister's enforcer…

HOW many members are there in the Tory party? On 13 March the *Times* ran a front page story based on a memo circulated to constituency party chairmen at the Tories' spring forum in Harrogate, which placed membership at 301,413, the lowest "since before the Second World War".

When the Tories got wind of this they immediately phoned the *Thunderer,* claiming the true figure was 325,500 and blaming the numbers doing the rounds in Harrogate on "a computer error".

The *Thunderer* was having none of it, so the Tories turned in desperation to the friendlier *Telegraph* which, always willing to help a friend in need, reported on the same day that: "The Tories have recruited an extra 16,500 members over the past six months". So that's all right, then.



WITH the cancellation of the Cheltenham racing festival, intelligence-gatherers at nearby GCHQ are wondering if Robin Cook will now find time to visit them instead.

As foreign secretary, Cookie is in charge of GCHQ's thousands of staff. He is also responsible for the vast sums of taxpayers' money which are being overspent on moving their HQ from one end of town to the other. He has been "going to visit" GCHQ for the past four years, but each time he cancelled and ended up at the races a mile away.

As one disgruntled spook asks: "Which other company in the world has a CEO that has never stepped through the doorway?"

BIRMINGHAM SPECIAL

A PALL of smoke could soon be rising from the Erdington district of Birmingham – from a pyre of election posters and leaflets for local MP Robin Corbett.

Corbett has just announced that he will not stand at the general election. By leaving his announcement so near to polling day, Labour's national executive committee (NEC) will now draw up the shortlist of candidates and so shoo-in a Blairite carpet-bagger.

The comrades had already re-selected Corbett after he said he had no intention of stepping down. But he abruptly changed his mind last week. Does a comfy berth in the Lords await? Heaven forfend!

The local Labour party will now have to pulp Corbett's election material. To rub salt in the wounds, his shock announcement coincided with the arrival in the area of top Downing Street official Derek Scott – who appears to have had some prior knowledge of the resignation.

An economic adviser to Tony Blair and a former partner of Channel Four's political editor Elinor Goodman, Scott will be anxious that already enraged local Labourites do not learn too much about his murky political past. He was influential in the SDP in the early 80s, standing in Swindon in 1983. This cost Labour's David Stoddart his seat (it went to a Thatcherite Tory instead) and memories are long.

In fact the ex-SDPer is Downing Street's *second* choice of candidate in Erdington. The first was to have been Tory turncoat Shaun Woodward who, it was understood, would have been parachuted into the seat at the eleventh hour. Unhappily for Woodward, his every movement around the country has been tracked by truculent lefties, and the distraught former Tory has already said he might not be able to return to parliament "this time".

With Woodward out of the way, a host of other wannabes has appeared. Last weekend the Birmingham *Evening Mail* reported that "journalist Sion Simon" is "thought to be interested", and Simon has indeed already been spotted in the area (though he may yet claim that he was simply paying his family a visit). Other hopefuls include Stephen Alambritis, from the Federation of Small Businesses; and Andrew Hood, a special adviser to Robin Cook. Another outsider is Karen Livingstone. As a woman and a trade unionist – she's a press officer for the T&G – it might be imagined she could make for an ideal candidate. But not of course for "new" Labour.

THE future of Birmingham's first potential Asian MP Khalid Mahmood hangs in the balance as the NEC prepares to investigate a dossier of murky allegations against the candidate selected a fortnight ago to succeed sitting Perry Barr MP Jeff Rooker.

Mahmood received a landslide of postal votes and, breaking all known records, the Sandwell Labour party has passed a "no confidence" vote in its brand new candidate.

Of a total qualified membership of 290, more than 135 applied for a postal vote – most of these, it has been alleged, came from the predominantly Asian Handsworth ward of Perry Barr. A member of the Handsworth executive committee, Clyde Wickham, told the Birmingham *Sunday Mercury* he had "resigned [from the Labour party] in disgust at the way this ballot has been conducted". Mahmood's detractors claim members were asked to sign blank application forms for postal votes; members applied for postal votes saying they were working but were shown on party records to be unemployed; postal votes or applications were collected by supporters of Mahmood without having been completed by the members themselves; and that a number of those appearing on the list of candidates for a postal vote were in fact abroad.

These allegations, if proved, could disbar Mahmood from standing, and Birmingham high court judge Mr Justice Holland, although refusing to grant an injunction before the selection contest on 11 March, told petitioners he recognised "the seriousness of the situation".

If Labour's NEC fails to get to grips with the Perry Barr shambles, the judge said he "would welcome further legal action" if all "internal efforts to resolve the matter have failed". Should be fun for the rest of us…

A COUPLE of days before chancellor Gordon Brown delivered his budget, Buckingham Palace got a surprise call from Downing Street.

The prime minister's aides offered to send Brown in place of Blair to give the Queen her weekly Tuesday briefing on the night before the budget, enabling the monarch a rare chance to ask questions of her chancellor. Brenda normally has to make-do with reading a copy of the speech delivered by red box on budget day morning.

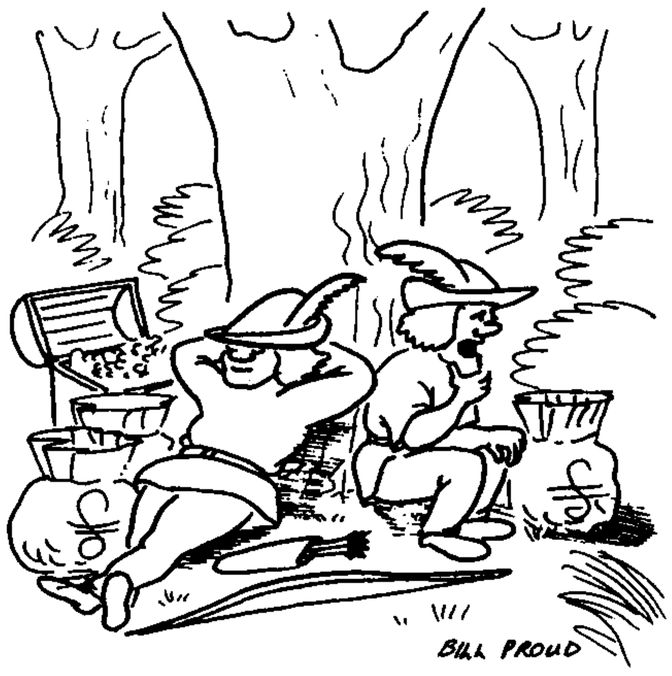
Brown is regarded with suspicion at the palace, where he is seen as the respectably republican face of Blairism; but Brenda agreed to the visit. Brown duly turned-up and unveiled his secrets to Brenda. He was surprised by her grasp of economic facts, while she found the smiling chancellor far more agreeable than she had expected. She only usually sees him in dour mood at state banquets, where he seems to be eyeing up the palace rooms like an estate agent.

Gordon took advantage of Brenda's good mood to compliment her on the economies made in the running of the royal household, making mention of the fact that a self-funding monarchy would be a tribute to her own economic skills (*Eye* 1022). But if he was hoping to instigate a discussion on the future of the civil list he was out of luck. The Queen, sensing danger, rose. And, as Brown had been briefed, once Brenda stands up the talk's over. Bad luck, Gordon.

LIFE IMITATES ART, PT. 94 *The limits of parody*

THERE is something about the shape of a spoon that is so curvaceous. It is so voluptuous. It is the sexiest piece of cutlery. The way you hold it, it is halfway between being a violin and a tulip.

— Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen,
Express & Echo, *7 March*



"I dunno, Robin, 'Enter a public private partnership with the rich and encourage the poor to plan for their retirement' just doesn't have the same ring to it"

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

AMERICAN Bob Kiley, Ken Livingstone's transport commissioner and would-be saviour of the London tube, has been heard to mutter that negotiating with Gordon Brown and the treasury is like trying to deal with North Korea.

A MESSAGE FROM THE LOBBY PARTY

"NEW" Labour's election campaign needs to make sure its "core" voters don't abstain as a protest against the party's drift from "traditional" issues into the arms of big business. To help it achieve this the party has filled its campaign with lots of... business-friendly lobbyists!

Chief among them is Dave Hill. He will be on loan from Bell Pottinger to lead the campaign. Among Bell Pottinger's leading clients are job-cutting steel firm Corus; safety-challenged British Nuclear Fuels; controversial baby milk seller Nestlé; drug firm Smithkline Beecham; and oil firms Texaco and BP.

Hill will not be the only Bell Pottinger man on Labour's side in the election. Howard Dawber, a former Bell Pottinger suit, is fighting the Cheadle seat. Dawber told *PR Week* that lobbying "mirrors a lot of the MP's job in that people come to you with problems and want to find solutions using politics". Or put another way, being a lobbyist is a bit like being a Labour MP because in both cases rich businessmen give you cash for favours.

IN Windsor, Labour's candidate is one Chris Fox, head of government relations at Tate & Lyle. Adopting Tate & Lyle's mouthpiece like this shows just how far the "project" has taken the party.

Tate & Lyle's anti-Labour campaigning dates back to the 1950s, when the firm's vociferous battle against nationalisation was widely credited with swinging the balance and causing the Attlee government to lose an election to the Tories. Tate & Lyle has given thousands of pounds to the Conservatives over the years; and it also gave financial support to the right-wing blacklisting outfit, the Economic League, which was led by family and company board member Saxon Tate.

WHILE the lobbyists are moving to Labour for the duration of the campaign, there is traffic in the other direction too. Former MEP Carole Tongue – who was deputy leader of the European Labour group – has joined lobbyists Citigate Westminster.

Among her new firm's clients are Enron, one of Labour's favourite big businesses. Citigate also represents almost every one of UK's private rail firms. In 1998 Tongue said: "As long as the European Commission's door is always open to powerful lobbyists and closed to concerns about the public interest, we will never establish a responsible media in Europe." Er, quite.

Once upon a time, a politician taking up a job with a lobbyist would be seen as "selling out" and giving up on politics. However, given Labour's enthusiasm for bringing lobbyists back into the party, this is probably just a sensible career move for Ms Tongue.

DOWN ON THE FARM

FOOT AND MOUTH SPECIAL 1

THE one thing certain about the foot-and-mouth (FMD) crisis is that agriculture minister Nick Brown is presiding over the greatest administrative cock-up even this government has ever put its hand to.

There is growing evidence that the Maffia knew of the presence of FMD as early as 4 December last and that the original source of infection was sheep. Warnings were sent in strict confidence to the European commission and other EU member state governments, while the Maffia took secret steps to contain the problem, hoping it could be eliminated.

The cover-up blew on 19 February when an inspector at an Essex abattoir discovered FMD in 27 pigs brought down from Northumbria. When the disease was confirmed at the Heddon-on-the-Wall pig farm four days later, the Maffia allowed this to be thought the original source of the outbreak. But already the epidemic was out of control, thanks to an unusual number of movements of sheep around the country, many originally bought by a small group of big dealers at Longtown market near Carlisle.

Many of these were "black sheep", bought to support a scam on EU sheep subsidies. Under EU quota rules, dealers and a small number of farmers had claimed hundreds of thousands of pounds-worth of subsidies and now needed the sheep to justify their claims. As infected animals were dropped off all the way from Cumbria via the Welsh borders down to Devon, FMD raced across the country. But because these movements were illicit, no records had been kept to show where the "black sheep" had gone.

By the time the outbreak "went public", the Maffia already feared as many as 80 percent of sheep in some areas could be infected. With diagnostic services breaking down under the flood of work, and a critical shortage of vets to carry out tracing work, officials feared these "black sheep" were now a vast but unknown reservoir of infection. With cattle soon due to be let out on grass from their winter quarters, they feared the epidemic could explode into the cattle population. Hence the unprecedented plan for a mass-cull of up to one million "healthy" animals, in the hope of catching all the infected "black sheep" before it was too late.

By now, though, stage three of the Maffia shambles was also under way: the chaos it has made of the slaughter operation, ignoring every lesson learned from the last 1967/8 outbreak as to how to minimise the risk of spreading infection. The 1969 Northumberland report found two things were vital. First, animals must be shot as soon as a vet spots infection. Second, they should be buried at once and on the spot. Even burning was ruled out as likely to spread infection.

This time, thanks to a complex raft of new EU rules, this has proved impossible. Clinical tests have to be confirmed, often taking days. Burial is virtually prohibited. Many infected carcasses have to be trucked miles through uninfected countryside to rendering plants. The insanity this leads to was illustrated in Cheshire when one farmer identified FMD in his sheep on Monday and had to wait four days for ministry vets to arrive to shoot his flock. Still giving off infection the sheep were not picked up for another two days. They were then driven across country until the van drivers got lost. Losing patience, they dumped the rotting corpses in a field full of live sheep and disappeared.

'E.N. Muckspreader'

FOOT AND MOUTH SPECIAL 2

STRANGE goings-on at an estate in Wiltshire, where police have gone to extraordinary lengths to prove that an outbreak of foot and mouth was down to the irresponsibility of walkers.

While police on duty there told reporters that reckless walkers had brought in the disease, locals were astonished to hear three plods, including their press officer, conspiring to "get a walker". The press officer explained to the others that since walking is not an arrestable offence, the officers would have to confront a walker, "wind them up" and then arrest them for breach of the peace. Sadly, no walker was found and MAFF later confirmed an FMD link with a dealer in Herefordshire.

The impression of agricultural crisis as media show intensified when the police also told journalists that, although the corpses of livestock were ready for lighting at 3pm, MAFF would wait until dark to give a better photo opportunity.

● AFTER crisis comes reaction: inquiries, reviews, royal commissions and politicians popping up all over the place to spout about farming reform.

Nick Brown's own "Thorough Review of Measures to Reduce Disease Risk" will look at "the implications of increased world travel, the globalisation of trade and modern farming methods on issues of disease control". Um, *hours* of work there, then.

But what is the point? We already know the answers. Independent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) the world over working in agriculture — not only animal welfare and disease, but food supply and safety, health, environment, resource use and pollution — are almost unanimous in their condemnation of high-tech agribusiness and its driving force, global free trade.

If anyone doubts the effects they need only visit the United States, champion of free trade, which is not only the world leader in inhumane, disgusting, wasteful and polluting agriculture, but cannot achieve even that proud ambition without $30bn a year subsidy. Freedom to Farm is dead!

'Gumboot'

Down on the Fish Farm

Seafood Splatter

SCOTTISH Executive second plaice fisheries boss, the MSP Rhona "Flounder" Brankin, gave the fake salmon farmers at Hydro Seafood a good talking to the other day. She told them they must maintain highest standards of husbandry and environmental protection. Of course they must!

One million young salmon died in Hydro Seafood rearing tanks north of Inverness last May. The company's Scottish supremo, David MacRackham, said it could have been caused by "something in the water". Was it? The day before the fish died, hatchery manager Ian Thorburn allegedly washed toxic zinc sulphate into the site's 17 tanks. He had told workers complaining of eye, skin and lung irritation that the white powder covering the tanks was just salt.

Mountainhealth Services of Stevenage thought otherwise. It confirmed the deposits were zinc sulphate; formed when a fault in a boiler produced the poisonous gas carbon monoxide that reacted with the hatchery's galvanised roof.

Fishery scientists from the government's laboratory marine in Aberdeen inspected the hatchery, as did Seap (Scottish environment pollution agency). Apparently, they found nothing amiss. Rackham said: "The actual loss of the fish has not been identified as being a result of this particular problem [toxic zinc sulphate on the roof, overalls, hair and hands of workers] and could have been coincidental."

The daybook in which staff recorded these matters has mysteriously "vanished". However, on 25 May local authority health and safety officials confirmed the presence of zinc sulphate, known to be toxic to aquatic life and a danger to human health.

'Old Trout'

EYE TV

Celebrity Big Brother (C4/BBC1)

YOU CAN just imagine Richard Curtis trying to sell it to them. Go on, it'll be a bit of fun. Only a week out of your time. It'll be a laugh. We've even taken the camera out of the loo. And remember – the clincher – it's all for charity.

This became rather a familiar refrain in **Celebrity Big Brother**. "It's all for charity," the inmates would chant, as they slumped hopelessly on sofas, wiping away tears and slurping more supermarket cider. Never mind that it was the rest of us who were actually giving the money to charity, when we each rang up 10 times to vote out Chris Eubank on the first day. For in the Big Brother house, vital mental health issues were at stake. Who would be the first to crack? And what would happen when the cider ran out? Millions tuned in, enthralled.

Jack Dee put it all into perspective. The best thing about being in the house, he said, was that it saved him having to watch Comic Relief. The biannual telethon, which, like most of the comedians who take part in it, used to be quite funny, now gives pubs and restaurants one of their best nights of the year as viewers flee in terror from its deadening smugness.

Try, if you can, to imagine anything less amusing than the sentence "Say pants to poverty", although the *EastEnders* sketch obviously pushed it close. What the show really needed was a dose of honest British viciousness. Was *Celebrity Big Brother* designed to provide this, or was it all just a terrible mistake? Whichever the case, this psychological train wreck of a programme skilfully distracted us from the main business of Red Nose Week, for which many of us will forever be grateful.

Of Chris Eubank, little need be said. Changing clothes every 20 minutes, and talking drivel most of the rest of the time, he understood the artificiality of the project better than anyone, and obviously had to go. The following two days were the best, as Vanessa Feltz visibly fell to pieces. Feeling alienated from her housemates and, it's reasonable to assume, everybody else in the world, she enjoyed the most public of mental breakdowns. "This is Big Brother. Will Vanessa please come to the diary room." "No," said Vanessa, "Fuck off."

Only a true drama queen would write "incarcerated restricted ridculed lampooned ambushed disconsolate distraught" over the dining room table in chalk; anyone else would just walk out the door. Outside, though, there were no cameras. Later on, when she was at her most vulnerable, you almost began to feel sorry for her. Then, when she left the house and regained some of her poise, you almost felt guilty for preferring her in tears.

The remaining quartet settled into an easier rhythm, although many viewers are probably still wondering who that Keith bloke was. In the morning, the daily hangover featuring Jack Dee in dressing gown and sunglasses, yawning horribly. Both Vanessa and young Clare from *Brooky* said they didn't normally drink, but pressure can make winos of all of us. All six bottles of wine disappeared on the first day, after which they chose the cheapest possible ways of getting out of their faces. The sight of Anthea Turner asking Big Brother for a can of Guinness will live in the memory of everyone who saw it.

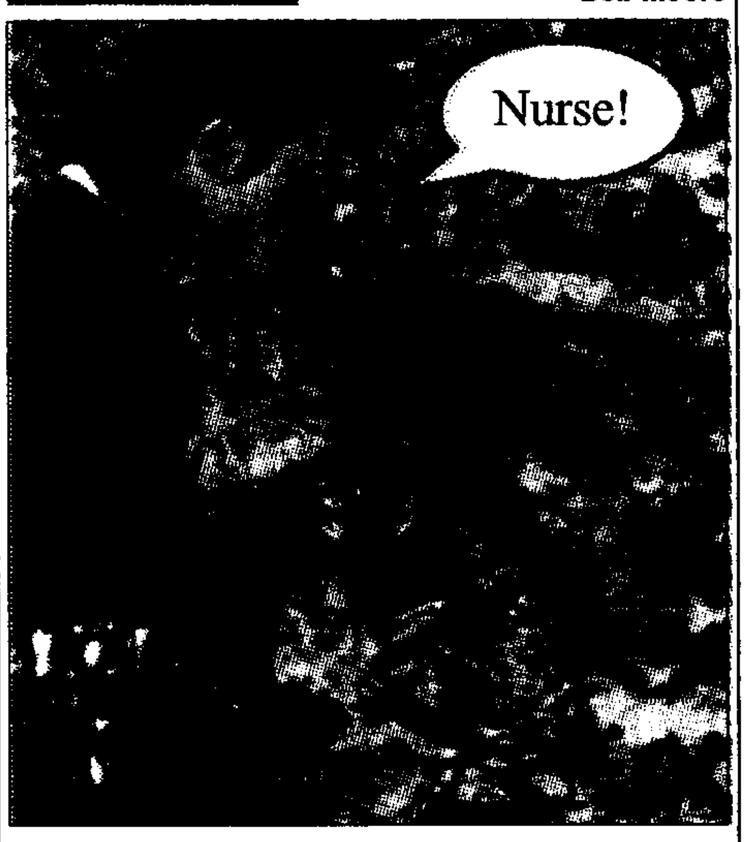
The reviews for *Celebrity Big Brother* have been vastly varied and probably irrelevant. You get what you take from a programme like this. The result, when it came, hardly mattered: we all knew Jack Dee would win. The real surprise, though, was the enduring strength of the format. Even world-weary celebrities are brought low by it, and even world-weary celebrities have something to learn from it, if only that they should never do anything like it again.

Not that any careers will have been harmed by *Celebrity Big Brother*: if anything, quite the reverse. Jack Dee is funny again, while even Anthea Turner came to seem vaguely human, despite the telling obsession with hygiene. (Her luxury: disinfectant wipes.) As for Keith, he remains Keith, whoever that might be...

'Couch Potato'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Michael Jackson Pollock

DUMB BRITAIN

This Morning with Richard and Judy, ITV

Richard Madeley: Who was Bill Clinton's vice president?

Contestant: I don't know.

Richard: Come on, he also stood for president himself. You know, Al…

Contestant: Al Jolson.

Judy: Which country was ruled by Tsars – France or Russia?

Contestant: France.

Fifteen to One, C4

William G. Stewart: After which town in Surrey are a form of healing magnesium bath salts named?

Contestant: Milk of Magnesium.

Stewart: New Zealand has two national anthems. One of them is God save The Queen. What's the other one?

Contestant: Australia Fair.

National Lottery Jet Set

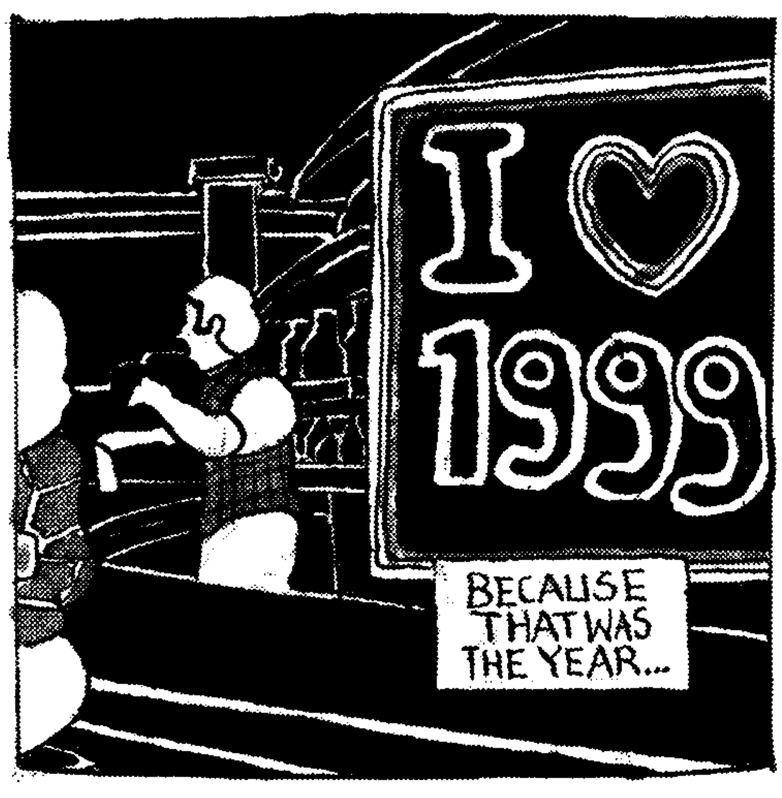
Eamonn Holmes: What was invented in 1926 by John Logie Baird?

Contestant: Electricity.

The Weakest Link, BBC

Anne Robinson: In fashion, what is the French for "ready to wear"?

Contestant: Pret à Manger.



MEDIA NEWS

THE taxi bomb attack on the BBC's news centre at White City will have come as no surprise to some members of staff.

As long ago as September 1999, one staffer wrote to the in-house mag *Ariel* noting that while the parking of bicycles was banned outside "because they could conceal terrorist devices... unmarked 'taxis' constantly park, unattended, on the road in front of Television Centre barely three yards from where the bicycle threat has been eradicated. Am I missing something?"

The correspondent was missing something: any kind of response to this point from BBC managers.

BBC bosses did at least respond to another correspondent who pointed out, long before "Shite City" was even completed, that it was not perhaps a totally brilliant idea to site a glass-fronted news production facility right next to a busy road, complete with handy park 'n' bomb vehicle facilities.

Managers at the time pointed out that "the IRA has not targeted the BBC" and carried on with the construction.

NEVER afraid of using a news bulletin to puff other BBC programmes (*"if you want to know more then watch..."* etc), the *Six O'clock News* carried a live report from Bridget Kendall about her own "webcast" with Vladimir Putin on BBC Online on 6 March.

"He likes Russian literature, Tolstoy, Russian music..."; and in a touching revelation about his family life, Kendall even revealed that "he can't tell his wife what to do", poor lamb.

Sadly Huw Edwards ended the item before viewers were told what Putin might have said about, say, the use of systematic torture by his troops in Chechnya, or his fierce opposition to the US missile defence system or indeed the near collapse of the Russian economy.

Details like this are now off-message at the new, cuddly, dumbed-down *Six*.

PLUGGING another bit of the Beeb is one thing, but changing the facts of a story to do so is quite another. But that is exactly what BBC News 24 did while covering Leicester City's FA cup defeat by Wycombe Wanderers.

The crucial Wycombe goal was scored by one Roy Essandoh, who joined the team after seeing an ad on ITV's Teletext service. Oddly, News 24 reported that Roy of the Wanderers had signed "following an advert on Ceefax" – the Beeb's rival service which doesn't take ads.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

TO THE astonishment of almost everybody in the music world, the shambolic Classical Brit Awards, which launched last year to a mixture of disbelief and derision, have been cobbled together again for 2001 on terms as vacuously self-important as before.

Radio producers, arts administrators, critics and a host of others loosely in the business have been invited by letter to join the awards "academy" – an institution that exists only in the mind of some PR executive somewhere.

As before, those who bothered to reply have been sent a shortlist with no explanation as to how or by whom it has been compiled. Once again the list of names supposedly representing the best of British classical music is a joke, dominated by Charlotte Church, Vanessa Mae and Izzy – someone whom a large proportion of voters last year hadn't heard of. Twelve months later they are probably no wiser.

The outrageous thing about the list is that every award category pitches these modest talents against one or two artists of substance. Which means that in the young performer category, voters are asked to choose between Ms Church, Ms Mae, Ms Izzy, Russell Watson and the heavyweight composer-pianist Thomas Ades.

For female artist of the year, the choice is – Ms Church, Ms Mae, Ms Izzy, Lesley Garrett and the international star soprano Renee Fleming. For ensemble album of the year Sir Simon Rattle finds himself up against the Mediaeval Baebes. If these awards were even semi-serious, the outcome wouldn't need a vote. But as they are, it does. And we should certainly assume the worst.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

"I never thought I'd see Constables in the Saatchi Gallery"

LUVVIES

"I think acting is about forgetting yourself in order to give the best of yourself. It's passing through you more than you're creating it. You're not the flower, but the vase which holds the flower."

JULIETTE BINOCHE
Interview magazine

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

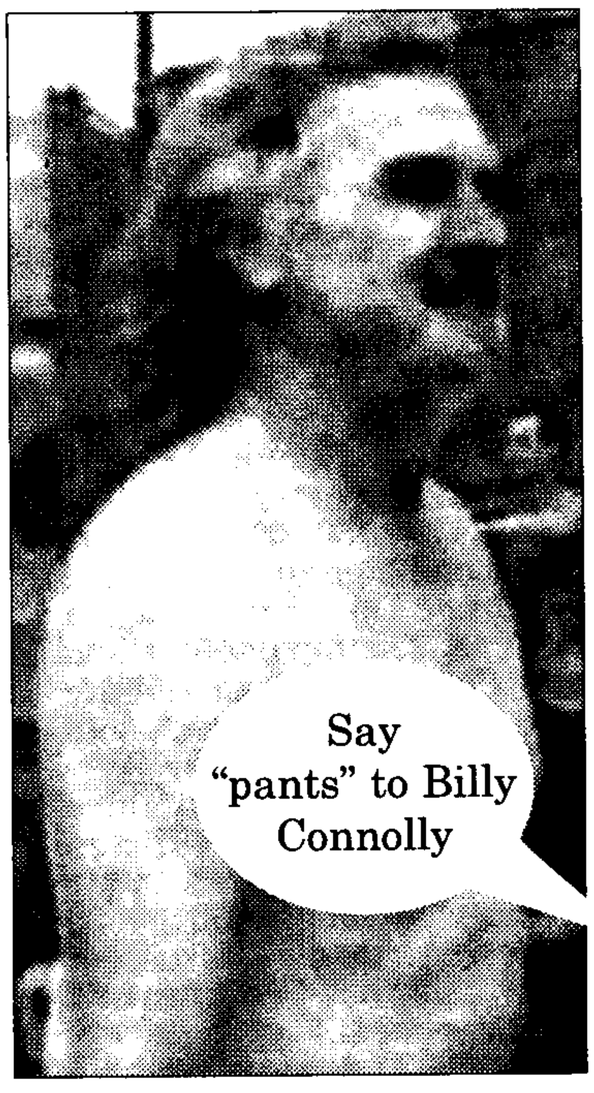
GOING LIVE

***BBC Breakfast* went live to "a man out walking his dog" on 7 March to find out about the foot and mouth crisis.**

"Do you think dog walkers will be increasingly irritated by the ban on using Tatton Park?" asked veteran war reporter Jeremy Bowen.

"Yes," predicted a man with a labrador.

COMIC RELIEF



AD NAUSEAM

APART from foot and mouth, one other reason not to leave your front room in the next few weeks is the sudden outbreak of ISA ads.

Thanks to the impending ISA investment deadline, an unsuspecting public has been subjected to a glut of some of the dullest posters since this time last year. Plucking any one example from the mire is a thankless task: the mere mention of names like Aberdeen (lots of figures); Merrill Lynch (large bull in front of Union Jack); Perpetual (with a Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? gag, no less); and Legg Mason (a cat is seen to "get the cream", if you follow) is enough to leave most people with their fist through their *FT*.

But if reader "complaints" – or rather, slightly scary tirades of quite unprecedented vitriol and bile – are anything to go by, then Henderson Global Investors take the prize as the very worst of a roundly pitiful bunch.

The Henderson campaign, dreamt up in house, runs under the banner of "Uplifting Thoughts". There are a large number of said thoughts, along the lines of, "get really rich", each displayed on a placard held by someone in a suit. The besuited leap skywards, full of the joys of spring. We are to surmise that, contrary to received wisdom, money *can* buy you happiness, and the best way to get it is to give what little you have to some faceless wonk at Henderson. And if you weren't convinced, beneath the shiny, happy people are reams of "best in show" financial awards that Henderson has won.

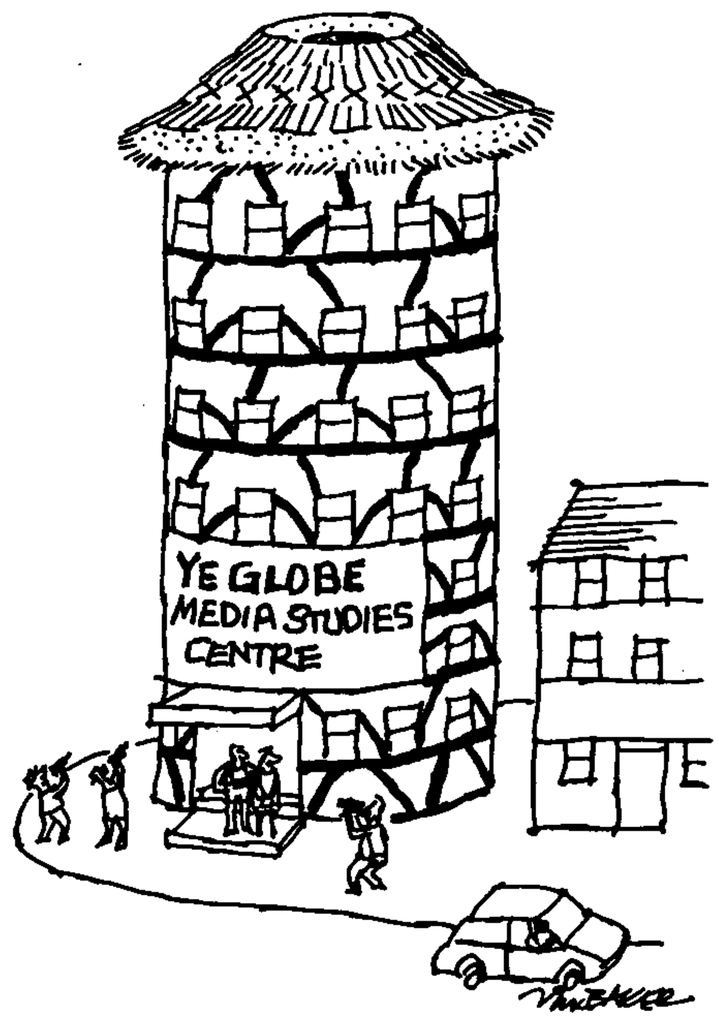
If it needs saying, trying to flog any form of investment as "better" than any other is a largely pointless exercise. For one thing, crowing that you've been "Top Performer" for the last 300 years holds little sway with the general public: only City fund managers know what these awards mean, and what they mean is a bigger bonus for City fund managers.

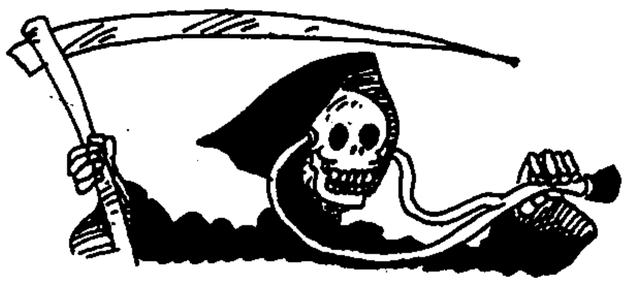
Then there is the small matter that FSA regulations now force advertisers to make plain in the not-so-small print that "past performance is no guarantee for the future". So you get massive splashes saying "You can't lose with us" juxtaposed with the elegant rejoinder "except you can". Multiply this by the endless clone funds all clamouring for a bite of the cake, and the result is a fetid mush of the meaningless and the self-defeating.

Which leaves just one uplifting thought: after the 5 April deadline, all this will stop and we can go outside again.

Election Ad Campaign Update: In a move that has stunned at least several people, "new" Labour unveiled more posters last week "conceived" by Trevor Beattie of TBWA.

The campaign consists of a mock film poster, an idea not seen since the last time it was done on the back of a fag packet, advertising "Economic Disaster II", with Mr Portillo as "Mr Boom" and Mr Hague as "Mr Bust". This hilarious pastiche is, it is presumed, all part of Trevor Beattie's ongoing plan to "change the world".





DOING THE ROUNDS

Whose Organ is it Anyway?

THE government's organ repatriation scheme is doing slow business, hampered by the fact that over the years the labelling has become a bit, um, confused.

In one London hospital an overseas research associate reclassified some specimens by his own secret code and left the hospital with it. And in many others, the labelling has just faded into illegibility over the decades. As one pathology professor put it: "One kidney looks much the same as another, and in some cases we can't be at all sure that we're giving relatives the right organ back. Not that they'd realise, but it makes a bit of a mockery of the process."

However, his biggest fear is that "new" Labour will order the "civilised burial" of the majority of organs that have not been reclaimed. "This would put back teaching and research by 50 years."

Anyone for thymus?

THE department of health has been quick to dissect doctors for the past practice of passing on the thymus gland of children undergoing heart surgery to drug companies for a nominal £10 fee to cover shipping costs. The strictly non-vital gland would have had to be removed anyway as part of the surgery, but the main objection was that the parents were not consulted.

However, in 1995 doctors at Great Ormond Street were worried about the ethical implications of this process and so consulted and got clearance from... the department of health.

Placenta practice

THE chairman of one of the royal colleges has expressed concern that pregnant women will soon be reclaiming their placenta. "When I was training, placentas used to be routinely bagged up, bunged in the fridge and passed on to drug companies to make Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin. We never got consent for this and I'm sure some of the women thought we performed a dignified burial ceremony in the hospital orchard." M.D. too has fond memories up being offered a placenta/frisbee to dissect at Cambridge medical school.

An alternative explanation for the mass storage of post mortem organs was offered by pseudonymous GP Tony Copperfield writing in the trade magazine *Hospital Doctor*. "Hospital food is so bland..."

Ash cash

FOR many years doctors have been able to supplement their incomes by signing cremation forms for (hopefully) dead patients. In the UK, there are several parts to the form which have to by completed by different doctors.

This is partly to check identity and to ensure the patient is fit for cremation (pacemakers explode in the oven). But it's also to double-check there is nothing suspicious about the death that may require referral to the coroner (eg if it may have been due to violence, injury, neglect, surgery or anaesthesia, alcohol, suicide or poisoning).

In practice one GP phones another and says: "Will you do my part two on an old lady who died of bronchitis?" The second then pops into the undertaker, quickly pulls back the sheet to look at the face, clocks the name of the toe tag and signs up for the ash cash. Alas, this endemic but rather laissez-faire approach is likely to come under fierce scrutiny as a succession of GPs take the stand at the Shipman inquiry. There for the grace of God, etc.

Not so Nice

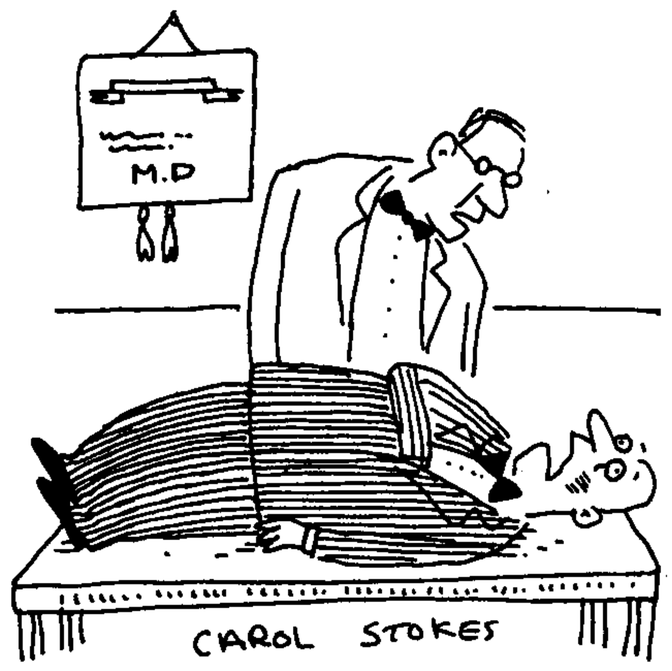
M.D. has been sent the unpublished submission from the entirely independent Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin (part of the Consumers' Association) to the supposedly independent National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice).

The DTB, like many doctors, cannot understand Nice's change of heart in deciding to recommend the anti-flu drug Relenza having previously cautioned against it.

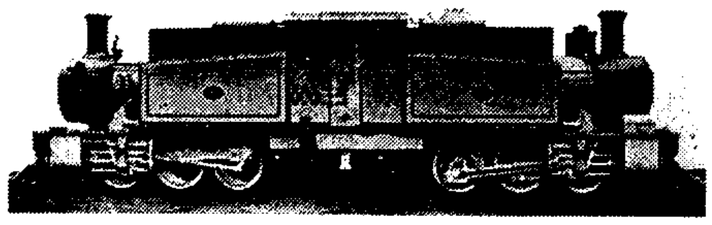
Rumours abound that the government has come under pressure from the manufacturer Glaxo Smithkline (GSK, see *Eyes passim*), but the DTB is moreconcerned about conflicts of interest among members of Nice's appraisal committee, which included Dr Trevor Gibbs, international medical operations director of GlaxoWelcome (now GSK). According to the DTB, expert comments were also provided by "Dr Douglas Fleming who, we understand, acted both in his own right and as a representative of the Royal College of General

Practitioners and has close links with GlaxoWellcome".

M.D.



"At least you've got your wealth"



SIGNAL FAILURES

The Optimistic Rail Authority

DESPITE the chaos of the last few months the strategic rail authority (SRA) has shied away from producing a strategy to reform the rail network around proven principles. Instead it has produced a "strategic agenda" based on keeping fingers crossed and hoping something will turn up from the private sector.

"This document is not a call for re-nationalisation, nor for vertical integration [trains and tracks managed by the same people], nor for revolutionary structural change," said SRA chairman Sir Alastair Morton, ruling out three of the most obvious ways to put the railway straight.

So what *does* he want? "It is a call to the industry for radical improvement in management, in operations, in method and performance and in service culture in the railway." Er... the very things the Tories and rail companies promised years ago but comprehensively failed to deliver. Simply calling on the industry to deliver won't make it do so.

The strategic agenda does recognise some failures. It admits competition between Anglia and Great Eastern on the Ipswich to London route (*Eye* 1000) has "proved too much for Anglia's finances", and concludes that "competition has served mainly to transfer the financial burden from user to taxpayer".

The SRA plans to end this by merging the franchises, but it still flirts with the silly Tory idea of competition on the same tracks, adding: "Perhaps on-line competition will become possible there some time in the future."

It also recognises Railtrack cannot finance and manage all development of the rail network, as is obvious to all who have watched the cost of upgrading the west coast line rise relentlessly (*Eyes passim*). But the SRA's solution is to invite separate consortia to handle major projects – essentially a resort to the private finance initiative.

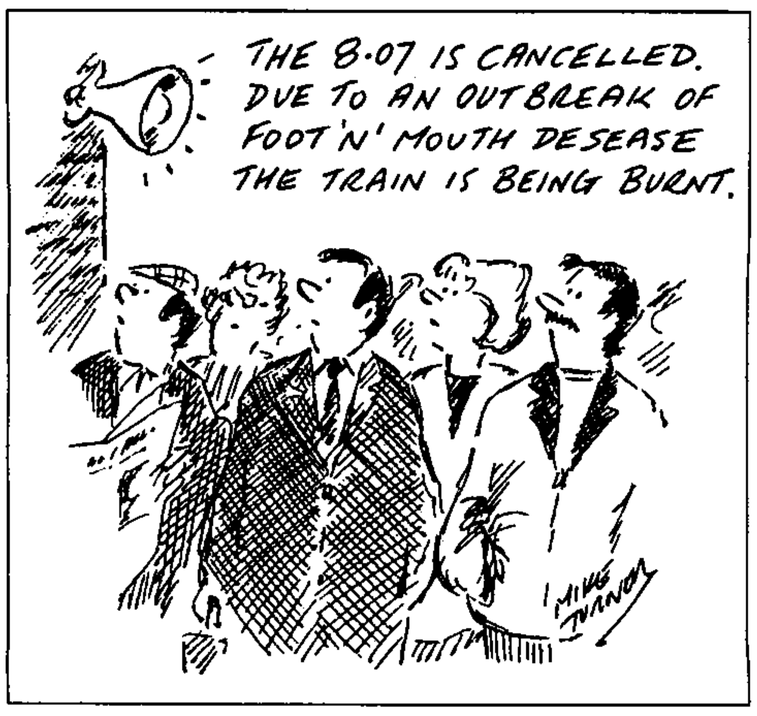
That will bring yet more players to an industry crying out for fewer. When a project is underway, there will be even more scope for confusion and dispute between the PFI group and the companies trying to keep the railway running. Somebody, presumably Railtrack, will have to monitor the actions of each PFI team even though Hatfield and other incidents have shown Railtrack incapable of monitoring other organisations thoroughly.

The PFI is all about getting something for nothing in the short term but paying through the nose for decades afterwards. Applying another set of profit-sucking leeches to the railway may result in passengers, taxpayers and freight consignors being charged even more to meet the railway's costs.

Although privatisation is discredited, the theory remains that investment money will flow more freely than under BR because the private railway is not subject to ministerial interference. But the strategic agenda admits the £7bn rail modernisation fund (RMF) – or what little is left of it after the Railtrack/Virgin dog's dinner on the west-coast line has been bailed out – will be subject to ministerial approval whenever big projects are involved.

The RMF is for projects "which have difficulty in funding themselves in unsupported commercial terms". That definition could apply to most rail upgrades, given that the west-coast scheme has gone haywire despite Virgin's phenomenal fares hikes and monopoly and the high earning potential of a long route connecting Britain's biggest cities.

In effect the treasury – which has stood firm against safety warnings and other rational arguments in the London Underground PFI negotiations – will have a stranglehold on the national railway's main investments but the government will continue to escape blame when things go wrong. It seems BR's chief weakness – key decisions driven by political rather than transport needs – will return under privatisation. The big difference is that BR was accountable... but private monopolies can pocket the wads of public cash, fail to deliver and then demand a fresh ransom.



Latest crashes

● BY treating the Selby rail crash as the result of a series of unbelievable coincidences, the government will excuse itself from action against the underlying problems of road safety. The inquiry may advocate minor changes to crash barriers at motorway bridges over railways, but that will do nothing to reduce the risks at other bridges and level crossings where lax road safety infects the railways.

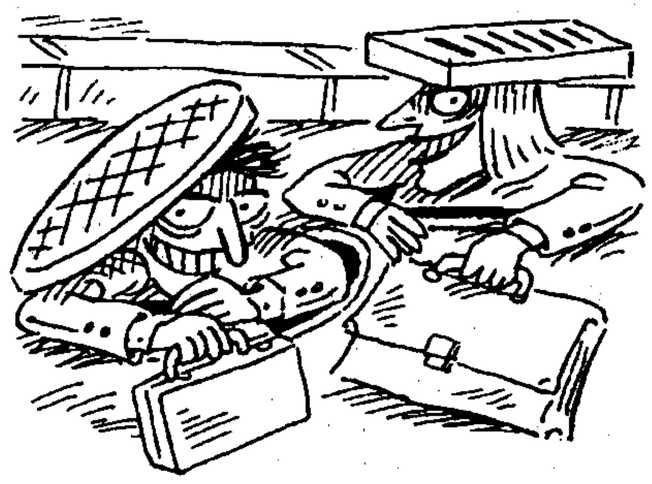
In 1999-2000, bridges under railways were struck 1,533 times by road vehicles and 40 of those incidents were classed as serious or potentially serious. Railway bridge strikes have more than doubled in seven years but no real action against reckless truckers is planned.

● THE collision at Hither Green, south London, last week reminded the industry that all is not well with the scheme to install train protection warning system by next year (see *Eye* 1018).

The accident would probably have been prevented by the automatic train protection promised more than 10 years ago or by TPWS, the home-made imitation of ATP which is less effective but cheaper. With the TPWS programme already way behind schedule, Railtrack is forced to recruit technicians from overseas where rail signalling is different. There is no coordination to ensure tracks and trains are fitted with TPWS simultaneously, starting with the busiest routes – south of the Thames. When Railtrack eventually wires up TPWS gear on the London Bridge lines, there may be more delay before the trains are fitted and the system is made to work.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS



MAD MAX

MAX CALLER, Hackney's £150,000-a-year new broom managing director, is in the middle of a race row after being caught suppressing evidence which showed two black managers had been wrongly accused of misconduct.

In December 1999 Sheila Harris and Steve Gittings, managers in Hackney's emergency repairs department, were suspended pending the outcome of an investigation into their handling of a complaint made by patrol officer Lorenzo Joseph. He claimed Harris and Gittings had not taken seriously his complaint that he had been bullied by colleagues after blowing the whistle on a stolen goods racket among council workers.

After a three-month investigation, in March last year a former executive director of Hackney, Lorraine Langham, chaired a disciplinary panel which found Harris and Gittings guilty of "misconduct". But Langham then told fellow executive director Joe Duckworth that she feared the investigation into Harris and Gittings had been seriously flawed.

Duckworth hired management consultant Mike Rocks to investigate the previous investigation. Rocks's report castigated the officers who had investigated Harris and Gittings, Maggie Challoner and Tariq Khan. Challoner, concluded Rocks, "had applied the council's human resources framework in an unfair, subjective, and discriminatory way"; Khan's actions "were motivated by personal considerations". He found both had contravened the council's code of practice and recommended that *they* be charged with gross misconduct. Neither was charged with anything.

So far, so Hackney. In November Lorraine Langham, who had left the council, contacted Unison branch secretary John Page and told him that in hindsight she believed she had "been party to an injustice" in finding Harris and Gittings guilty of misconduct.

Harris and Gittings lost their appeal to have their names cleared. Hearing that appeal was Max Caller, who chose to ignore both Langham's honourable admission of error and the Rocks report.

Two days before the appeal hearing, after a great deal of prevarication, Caller gave Unison a copy of the Rocks report — with large chunks of the text blanked out. Caller explained that he had censored "irrelevant" passages. So Unison went to an employment tribunal, which ordered Caller to produce an unedited version. When the texts were compared it was clear that the "irrelevant" matter included – would you believe it? — all the passages which found Challoner and Khan had discriminated against Harris and Gittings, as well as the recommendation that Challoner and Khan should be charged with gross misconduct.

Now Harris and Gittings have lodged race discrimination claims with an employment tribunal. The only people within the council in a position to call the managing director to book for his behaviour are the three main party leaders — from whom there has so far been a deafening silence. The commission for racial equality, meanwhile, has served a non-discrimination notice on the council for "persistently breaking the race relations act". In Hackney, some things never change.

THE MIGHTY QUINN

DONCASTER Labour councillor John Quinn leads something of a charmed life. In 1989 bewildered Doncaster audit officials puzzled over an expenses claim by Quinn and fellow councillor Ron Gillies for a train journey to a conference at Bournemouth — because on their desk was a claim from leisure services director Gordon Dykes for petrol spent on, er, driving Gillies and Quinn to Bournemouth. No action was taken.

In the mid-1990s Quinn became mayor. In this role he hosted a secret meeting in the mayor's parlour with planning chair Pete Birks and planning officer Graham Raynor to gift developer Alan Hughes planning permission for the notorious £2.5m "Poppyfields" site (see *Eye* 994). Birks, Raynor and Hughes have all since been arrested. Quinn went on to become an "oppressive influence" on planning officers, according to the district auditor, over the Churchfields site in Rossington, worth £4.5m. Coincidentally, Quinn's son Ronnie acquired the show house on the site.

Later, Quinn gave his friend Hughes's phone number to rookie councillor Marie Lane in an attempt to win her support for another speculative development. Quinn was suspended by the regional party in 1997 but cleared on appeal by a committee chaired by senior Newcastle councillor Kevan Jones, who was selected last week as Labour's parliamentary candidate for Durham north.

Now Quinn is deputy mayor. Two of his predecessors in the job in recent years have been fined for expenses fiddles, one was jailed and a fourth has yet to be tried on more than 25 charges. No wonder the job is seen in Donny as the political equivalent of "the bed next to the door".

● SO FAREWELL, then, Wakefield Labour councillor Chris Heinitz, sentenced at Leeds crown court to 80 hours' community service plus £501 costs after admitting forging the signature of his agent on his expenses form for last May's local government elections (*Eye* 1006). Although Heinitz remains a councillor in the Labour stronghold, he has had to step down as chairman of culture secretary Chris Smith's regional cultural consortium quango — to which he was appointed shortly before his arrest last year. His expertise in the "creative industries" will surely be missed!

LOAD OF CAPITA

SHAREHOLDERS in "outsourcing" specialist Capita will no doubt be chuffed at news that operating profits are up 50 percent in the last year, to £53m. The same cannot be said for some of the local authorities who handed over the running of their housing benefit (HB) and other services to Crapita.

Councils learning the hard way that Capita's promises are not worth the paper they are written on include the London borough of **Bexley**, which in 1996 awarded the firm a 10-year contract to run HB after Crapita offered to process claims for less than half what it charged other boroughs. Councillors duly agreed to pay Capita £800,000 a year. The company has now demanded an extra £658,000 a year for the remainder of the contract to prevent the benefit system collapsing.

Capita looks set to lose its contract with **Lambeth** after consultants the Barony Group recommended that the service be brought back in-house. The final nail in Capita's coffin is likely to be a forthcoming benefit fraud inspectorate report which will castigate Crapita's performance.

Capita, however, continues to gobble up contracts from starry-eyed councils up and down the land. As the *Eye* goes to press, **Blackburn with Darwen** council in Lancashire is set to hand over most of its services to the firm, which is promising the creation of 500 new jobs and "massive new investment" in the local economy. The reality of the Crapita way is illustrated in Tory **Kent,** which handed over its payroll services to the firm a year ago, with the promise of a £300,000 saving over three years. The council has just had to spend £800,000 updating its computers to make the Capita system work.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Cllr Ella MacRae (Loch Ness East) raised more than eyebrows after successfully proposing Cllr Drew Millar (Portree) for lifelong learning on the education, culture and sport committee. Shortly after he was elected unopposed she entered the members' lounge and fondled the council press officer's behind. He jumped and she shrieked: 'Ooh, sorry, I thought you were Drew Millar!'"

— Highland council report in the *Inverness Courier*.

High Principals

ACADEMICS are one of the biggest groups affected by new questions of copyright raised by electronic publishing, so it is only right that universities should look into the issue. But not all institutions have come up with a response as extreme as that of University College London (UCL).

In December 2000 UCL's executive officer for teaching and learning, Richard Bolley, sent a proposal for new guidelines on intellectual property rights (IPR) to all heads of department, inviting comment from members of staff by the middle of February. These guidelines propose that every single piece of teaching material created by UCL staff be copyrighted to the university.

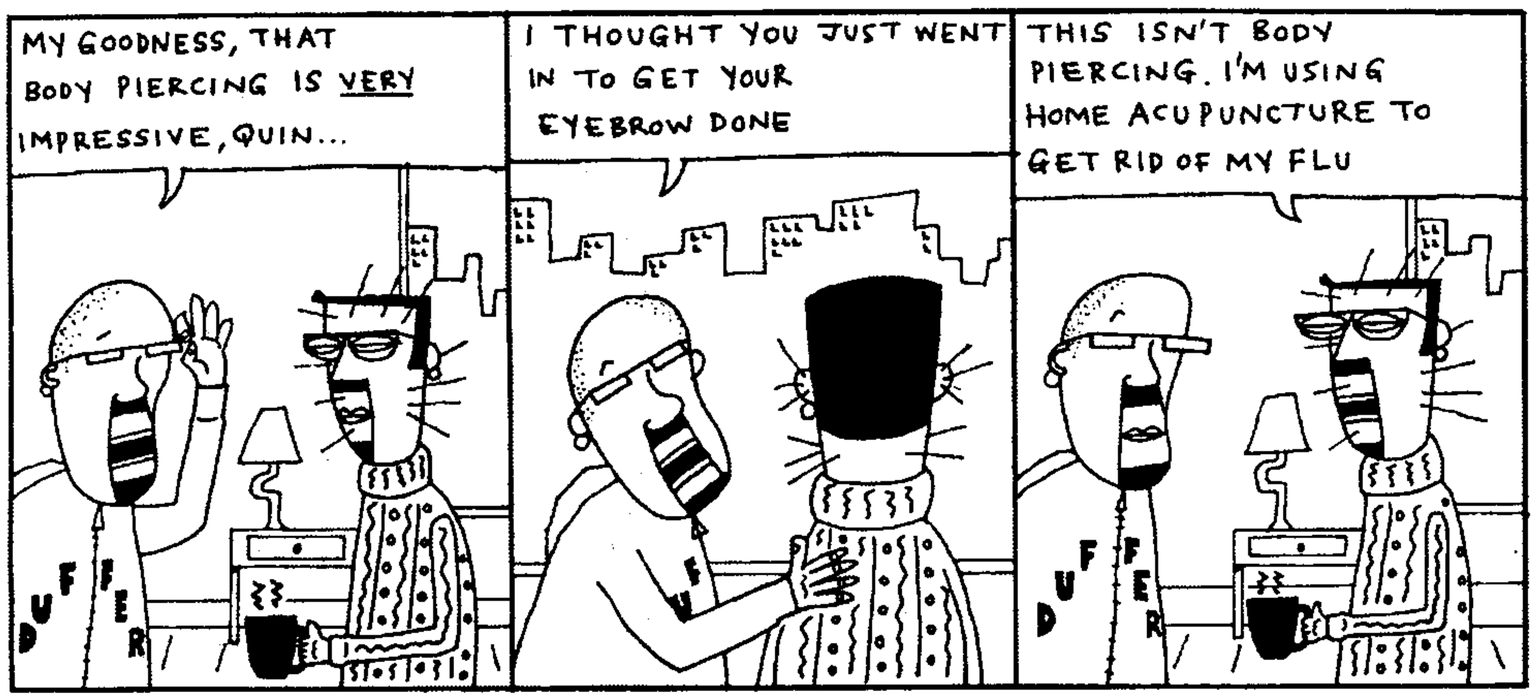
If the guidelines are approved, lecturers who move to another university will not be able to take their handouts from previous years with them without permission from their head of department, in effect hampering academic freedom of movement. And although the university states in the new proposals that it would probably waive its right to gain financially from books written by its employees (at present almost always copyrighted to the author), there is no guarantee this would be the case.

The draft is the brainchild of Fred Friend, a former UCL librarian who has risen to the heady heights of director of scholarly communications and chairs the working party set up to draft the IPR guidelines. He argues that a scenario could be envisaged in which UCL was forced to pay for an electronic package containing material produced by its own staff. Nowhere is it explained, however, how this argument can be extended to claim ownership of the entire academic output of UCL employees.

Last month the UCL branch of lecturers' union AUT rejected the proposals outright. The union stated that the majority of departments and members who commented on the draft guidelines consider them "wholly unacceptable", and it passed a motion of no confidence in the academic management "for circulating proposals of this nature, thereby needlessly damaging the morale of the academic staff and seriously endangering the international reputation of the College in the event that these proposals become known outside the College".

The AUT also pointed out that other universities which have recently looked into revising their IPR policy, such as Cambridge, have drawn exactly the opposite conclusions to Friend's committee.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER


MY GOODNESS, THAT BODY PIERCING IS VERY IMPRESSIVE, QUIN...
I THOUGHT YOU JUST WENT IN TO GET YOUR EYEBROW DONE
THIS ISN'T BODY PIERCING. I'M USING HOME ACUPUNCTURE TO GET RID OF MY FLU
DUFFER

NOOKS and CORNERS

I FIRST wrote about Somerset House in 1983 (*Eye* 567), complaining that the finest complex of public buildings in Britain was neglected and largely inaccessible to the public. Since then things have improved: the Courtauld has moved into the old Royal Academy rooms, the great courtyard has been liberated from cars and the riverside terrace opened to the public. Yet today the fabric of the civic masterpiece of Sir William Chambers is becoming more compromised than ever it was by the Inland Revenue or births, marriages 'n' deaths.

First, a ramp has been placed between Waterloo Bridge and the terrace, crudely designed — I am sorry to record, by Dixon & Jones — in inappropriate materials and whose conspicuously slanting form clashes painfully with the dominant horizontals of both Somerset House and the bridge.

But worse now threatens because of the modern shibboleth of disabled access. In fact the disabled are already catered for: when Somerset House was restored for new uses, the paving was subtly altered at either end of the terrace and a disabled entrance discreetly placed within the eastern arch, connecting with the internal spinal corridor.

But Duncan Wilson, chief executive of the Somerset House trustees, insists this is inadequate as part of the corridor has since been taken over by the Hermitage Galleries. So, instead, he is demanding more disabled access in the very centre of the grand Thames-side elevation of Somerset House, regardless of the damage it will cause. Incredibly the trustees propose a lift on one side of Chambers' steps down to the terrace from the central Seamen's Hall which involves both cutting through the long stone balustrade and beneath the sill of a window. No research has been done to establish whether reasonable demand can possibly justify this. The building is after all one which, Joshua Reynolds considered, "will remain to many future ages an illustrious specimen of the architect's abilities".

English Heritage is, naturally, unhappy about this but can only propose an alternative involving the alteration of Chambers' steps which is almost as bad. The plain fact is that the thing cannot be done and ought not to be done. It is about time English Heritage took a stand on the grounds both of architectural quality and commonsense, especially when discreet disabled access already exists.

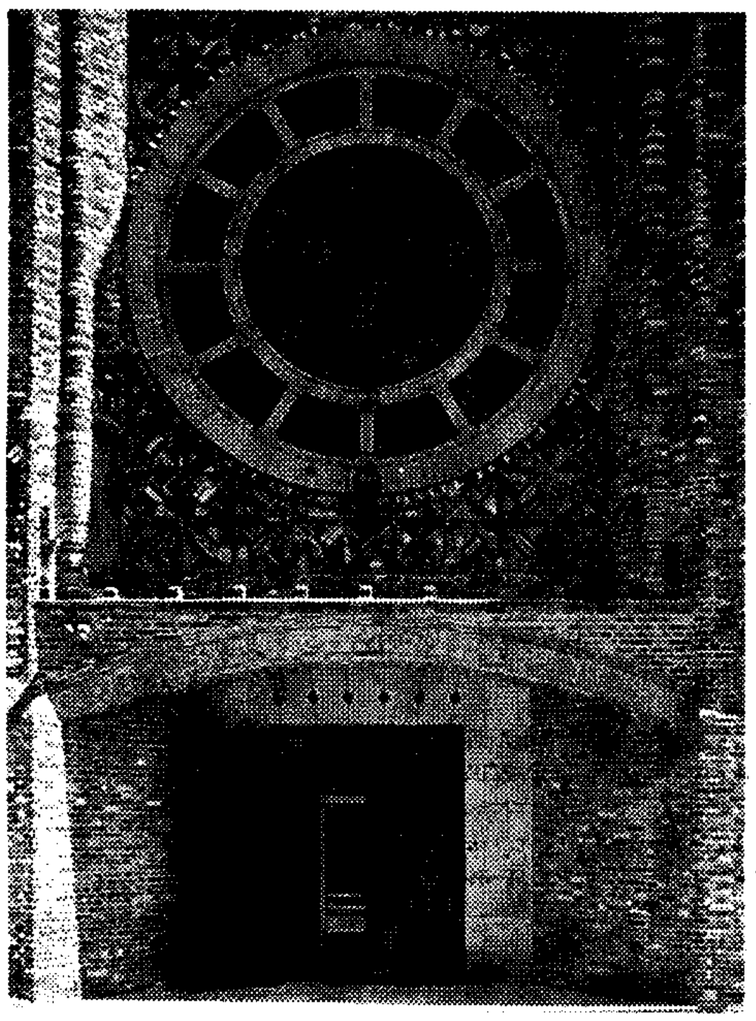
THERE is another lesson to be drawn from the grade one-listed Somerset House. For while individual householders are often mercilessly harassed by local authorities or by English Heritage over details like new glazing bars or railings or even external paint colour, large institutions and rich and powerful individuals seem able to flout listed building controls with apparent impunity.

Take the British Museum. I have already commented on the barbaric treatment of the entrance to the Great Court and the inept junction of the nice shiny new floor with Smirke's giant order (Eye 1021), but there is more. It is not just the wrong stone: listed building consent was never obtained for building a parapet on the north and east sides of the court where there was none originally, nor for replacing the parapet and coping that was there; the original joinery of the windows in the Great Court has been painted black when it was originally of unpainted oiled oak; and no listed building consent was granted in advance for the demolition of the old North Library — a decent and civilised room compared with the crude interior of the usual flat white walls and steel 'n' glass railings which has replaced it.

Trivial matters? Or an arrogant contempt both for the law and for great architecture which would never be tolerated from ordinary mortals?

MORE about threatened churches. St Osmund's, Parkstone, in Poole in Dorset, is a peculiar and most remarkable building. Outside it is a bold composition in variegated materials — handmade bricks and terracotta — all carefully detailed in a sort of Byzantine Expressionist style. Inside the spaces are cleanly vaulted above handsome terracotta arches.

The chancel dates from 1904-05 but the rest of the church was completed by E.S. Prior with Arthur Grove in 1913. In effect, St Osmund's is the last masterpiece of that most interesting Arts and Crafts architect Edward Schroeder Prior and is characteristically original and — unfortunately perhaps — experimental.

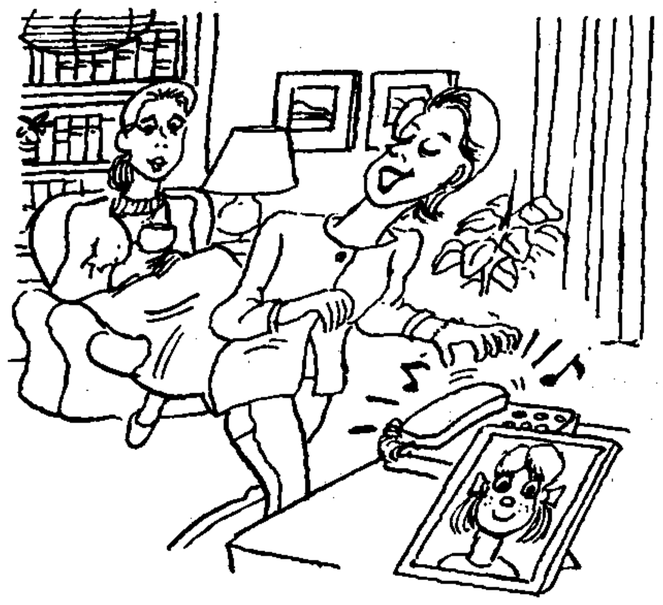


The barrel vaults over the aisles and transepts and the dome over the crossing were constructed in lightweight clinker concrete; but Prior, like other innovative Edwardians, did not know what we now know about reinforced concrete: the thin vaults have absorbed moisture, rusting the steel mesh reinforcement and causing structural problems. The dome was partially rebuilt in 1922 and the south aisle rebuilt in 1950. Now there are more cracks and the church has been closed. The prospect is therefore bleak — but not hopeless.

St Osmund's is listed — grade II* — and its architectural importance is widely recognised. English Heritage has grant-aided repairs to the church in the past and is probably willing to do so again. It is anxious that remedial action is taken while tests are carried out to establish the precise nature of the problem and so find the best solution. But the diocese of Salisbury has abandoned the church and started the process to make it redundant, arguing that the cost of repairs is way beyond the means of the parish.

'Piloti'

"We bought Jocasta a mobile phone so we know where she is and that she's safe"



"I've been mugged for my mobile!"

Pseuds Corner

I have a dim memory of travelling from Oxford to London with James Fenton one afternoon during the Falklands campaign. He looked more than usually morose. During the journey he gripped or tenderly patted various parts of himself that seemed to be in pain. I asked him what ailed him: his head, his teeth, his gut? "It's this war," he replied and emitted a muffled groan as we passed High Wycombe.

PETER CONRAD
Observer

Cosmetic-polemic / Distinguished byrelics / Destructive aesthetic / Intravenous agnostic / Intravenous agnostic / Intravenous agnostic /Intravenous agnostic / Intravenous.

MANIC STREET PREACHERS
Chorus of "Intravenous Agnostic"

...Chris Rea, singer, 50; Alan Sillitoe, writer, 73; Brooklyn Beckham, 2.

***Sunday Times* birthdays**

Credit Suisse First Boston has a long tradition of supporting the arts and is particularly pleased to sponsor this major artistic event. The ideas that stimulated the rise of baroque

art at the onset of the seventeenth century are echoed in Credit Suisse First Boston's commitment to empowering change in the twenty-first century.

Programme notes, RA
"The Genius of Rome" exhibition

THE BIG DEBATE: Is this the death of traditional KM [Knowledge Management] consultancy? Moderator – Ron Young

Dave Snowden, Head of the IBM Institute of Knowledge, will argue that KM has initiated the bounding [*sic*] of Taylorism and scientific management to routine matters – and thus the end of consultancy-led solutions based simply on analysis and expert judgement for major new initiatives in the management of human assets. He will argue that in the future, consultancies will need to focus on building descriptive self-awareness and self-organising ecologies.

"Knowledge Management"
conference brochure

HIRST, DAMIEN: Historical Relationships. ICA, London, 1991

Obscure object in white tube, being Hirst's first multiple, container of white card tubing, ping-pong ball in glass (beware of imitations, this one turns yellow over time, and should), and lithographed "instruction label" signed and numbered edition of 100. Hirst's major show at Gagosian in NY October 2000 brought home beneath the playing with death a process ineluctably *inseparable* from both temporal transience and its absence... Waterfilled vitrines of sustenance and erosion, bringing oxygen and causing rust... witness to the life of fishes no less than to metallic birthing-chairs' erosion... **£2000**

Index Books, catalogue no. 5, 2001

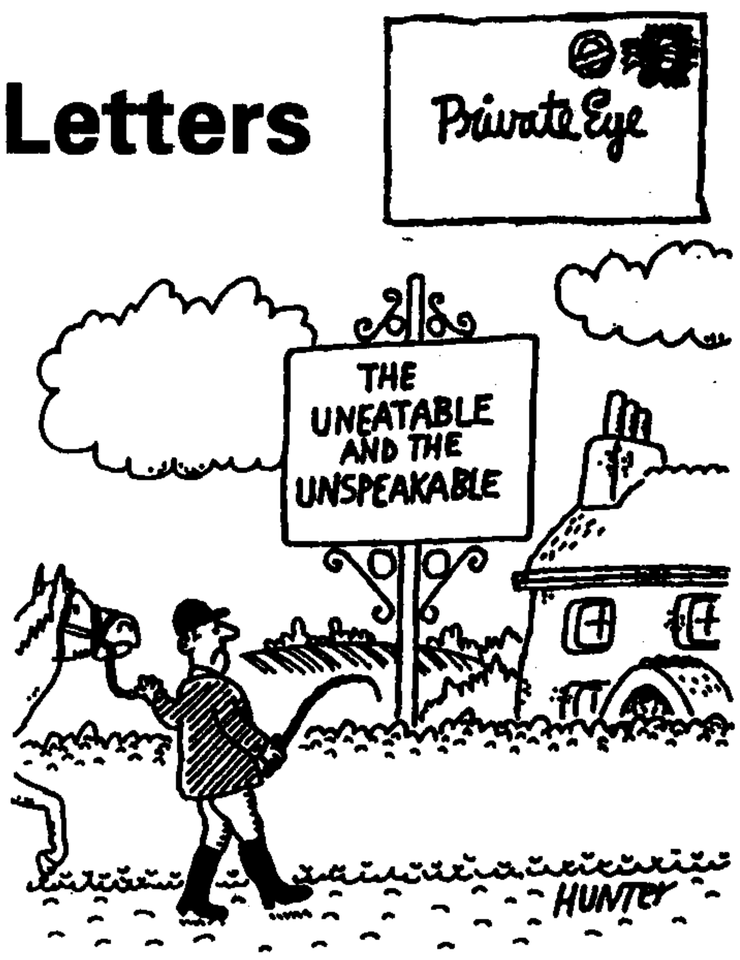
But when I demurred and said that I think anorexia is a latent obsessive-compulsive disorder that's potentiated by this kind of culturally promulgated fixation with body image, Twiggy crowed: "You're right, actually!" Which is refreshing, because usually when I say things of this form, people look a little nonplussed.

WILL SELF
Independent on Sunday

CONTRIBUTORS: Edward Lindsay, James Redwood-Davies, Alex Graham, Stephen Lock, Peter Carter, J. Irvine, Jim Taylor.

£10 paid for entries

Letters



Those Countryside Alliance letters in full...

Sir,

The Countryside Alliance advert has flushed out some Private Eye readers who don't like to hear both sides of the story. No great loss, they were clearly not suited to the magazine in the first place. Please can you restart my subscription immediately?

Many thanks.

R. RAYNER,

Via e-mail.

Sir,

Private Eye has given me some good laughs over the years but last issue's letters page was the funniest. All those "right on" creeps (aka Disgusted of Islington, aka Tutting Puritan against Yokels, aka Fluffy Bunny Lover etc.) supporting fashionable "liberal" causes, whingeing that the Countryside Alliance should dare to advertise their views publicly and then threatening economic sanctions against the noble Lord Gnome.

If they cannot subscribe to freedom of speech then they should not subscribe to Private Eye.

Yours faithfully,
RUSS INURBIS (MRS),

Via e-mail.

Sir,

I do not believe that Private Eye stands in need of any lectures on political correctness. Moreover, why is it almost invariably the supporters of "progressive" causes and "enlightened" viewpoints who, while exercising their own right of free speech, wish to deny it to those who disagree with them?

Voltaire must be turning in his grave.

Yours faithfully,
COLIN JAMES BUTTWELL,

Cardiff.

Sir,

I was astonished to see so many expressions of hatred in your letters columns. People of such pinched outlook and nasty disposition are seldom able to read. Having so many on your subscription list makes it a curious and valuable asset to specialists in psychopathology such as myself. How much?

MICK McMANUS,

Via e-mail.

Sir,

I am disappointed that you devote an entire column of your letters page to those who wish to bring to an end yet another great British tradition, practised by wealthy countryside dwellers for generations – spending their money on prominent yet seemingly fruitless advertisements. I see no justification for a ban on this behaviour. By continuing in such pursuits, they are doing a great deal of good for the community, ie keeping subscription fees down.

Yours faithfully,
ADAM CHERRETT,

Via e-mail.

Sir,

To anybody who has cancelled their subscription after your "scandalous betrayal", I say goodbye, piss off if you can't take a joke and then I won't feel I'm soiling my hands by sharing this excellent publication with you.

Oh and take the Countryside Alliance with you when you go.

Yours in despair,
FRANK WYATT,

Via e-mail.

Sir,

I hope not all your subscribers are book-burning bigots who cannot tolerate your running ads from the Countryside Alliance. Are we only allowed to read propaganda put out by animal rights enthusiasts?

At least, the Alliance is spending its own money. Comrade Ken Il Leninspart, in contrast, has diverted taxpayers' money to glorify himself in two consecutive full-page ads (issues 1022 and 1023) without a squeak of protest from you or your readers.

EDWARD BELL,

Via e-mail.

Sir,

Have these people never heard of freedom of choice? Freedom of the press? Freedom of minorities to pursue practices that others may disapprove of? I personally disapprove of advertisements from agencies such as Oxfam, Amnesty International etc. Why should I be made to feel guilty for the excesses of foreigners towards their own people, and send money to these people so that their agencies can interfere in social engineering whilst the governments concerned can save their cash to buy weapons to kill even more people? I feel like cancelling my subscription to a magazine that publishes so much left-wing illiberal crap. (Only kidding.)

W. WALKER,

Holme.

Sir,

What was that Countryside Alliance ad in Eye 1022 that prompted all those hysterical letters? Could we see it again please? Anything that can get the Veggie Hezbollah loons into that much of a tiswas must be worth a second look.

But seriously, I'm disgusted that your organ should be seen promoting free speech and selling space to people who steadfastly refuse to swear allegiance to New Labour's banners. Stop it, or after the re-election you will be put in cattle trucks and "re-settled" in the East.

C.H. WILLIAMS,

London SW9.

Sir,

Although I usually ignore your page 2, I am disappointed to find a dull ad by the sort of global capitalist bankers who keep the Third World poor and fleece their customers at home. Couldn't you find anything a little more controversial for your next issue?

MARTIN CAMPBELL,

Via fax.

Sir,

Never mind – the editor can relax in the knowledge that the average IQ level of Private Eye readership has just shot up, now that the "cuddly bunny" brigade have transferred their subscriptions to Disneyworld News etc.

Yours faithfully,
ALISON BOLT,

Cumbria.

Sir,

The splendid thing about your esteemed organ is that there is always something to offend everyone. People who are intolerant enough not to accept this should, in my view, be strung up as it is the only language they understand. I have just renewed my subscription by direct debit and jolly good value it is too.

DR B. MOYSE,

Bridgwater.

Sir,

I read with alarm the shocked letters concerning a grossly offensive advertisement in issue 1022. With trembling hands I re-examined my copy. Which advert could have so upset the usually so tolerant readers of Private Eye? Perhaps the one for expensive shoes: all those poor animals farmed intensively and trucked huge distances to slaughter, just for some fancy leather? Or the one for fine wines: all that money for the rich to pour down their engorged throats? Or the various small ads assisting various kinds of hanky-panky?

But no! Shock, horror! The advert that provokes my fellow readers to such indignation as to cancel their subscriptions was one for what would have been the biggest ever peaceful protest in our country, and all in defence of freedoms which only Nazi Germany has previously tried to abolish...

Yours, etc,
PIP MARTIN,

Fordingbridge.

Sir,

I have laughed many times at your humorous sketches on subjects such as tragic rail, sea or plane disasters, in which many people have been killed, injured and left grieving for their lost loved ones. But I must draw the line at an advert supporting the hunting movement, which results in the death of a few foxes.

How could your magazine accept payment to print such a thing, as a Labour supporter I cannot condone such action, it is...

Yours,
THE URBAN UNTREATABLE ANIMAL CONSCIENCE,

Dorchester.

Sir,

I am definitely considering cancelling my subscription as I had not realised how far downmarket you had gone. Do I want to be in the company of people who read the adverts.

Yours faithfully,
P. TOMASELLI,

Bristol.

● *Thanks for the huge number of letters making similar points. Ed.*

Anagram

Sir,

I can't help wondering whether Peter Mandelson's recent exoneration from blame could be attributed to his link (however tenuous) to his judge: "Sir Anthony Hammond" is an anagram of "I'M NOT HARSH ON MANDY".

I think we should be told.

CHRIS STURDY

Cheadle Hulme.

Brown-nosing

Sir,

You refer to clashes between Barry Sheerman MP and Chris Woodhead. Could this be the same Barry Sheerman who has been such a devoted human shield for Gordon "Prudence" Brown over the Laura Spence/Oxford admissions affair? By all accounts, Sheerman and his fellow Labour hacks on the education select committee did a fine job in terms of whitewashing the whole episode after it was shown that Brown's comments were predictably ignorant and prejudiced. The Labour majority produced such a grotesquely sanitised report that even the Liberal Democrat on the committee, Dr Evan Harris (MP for Oxford West), refused to sign it.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL McGOWAN,

Sanderstead, Surrey.

Very satyrical

Sir,

Surely the answer to the question posed by the blonde on the cover of Eye 1023 is "pay and display".

JAMES SHERRATT,

Via e-mail.

I-SPY *Lowestoft*

Submitted by Richard Courtauld. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

More needling

Sir,

Now that the animal rights lobby has firmly established that there is no shame in lacking a sense of humour whilst subscribing to your organ (Eye 1023 and doubtless others), I feel that I might come out of the closet: I am responsible for the autism epidemic. I, a humble paediatrician, have single-handedly been responsible for the huge rise in the number of diagnoses of this disorder! True, the overwhelming majority have exhibited symptoms well before the age of immunisation (if carefully asked about); true, the vast majority would not be so diagnosed by my more cautious colleagues; but what the hell – there's nothing like a good epidemic to boost business, is there?

I've yet to hear a single established authority on the condition accept any link with MMR, nor have I yet seen any convincing evidence of it myself. I am, however, aware of comparative studies of incidence rates showing that if consistent criteria are applied there has not actually been any rise in the number of cases. What has happened (and I hold my hands up to this) is that doctors are willing to apply the diagnosis at much lower levels of disability – thus inevitably there are more cases! Incidentally, this applies to many other developmental conditions of childhood, and reflects a "medicalisation" of children's behaviour – children are no longer allowed to be a little odd, or different, or even just "below average" – they must all be "diagnosed".

*I realise that your organ works on the principle that if you stir up enough sh*t eventually you'll find something, but your current ill-informed campaign is potentially harmful to children – not least in the drop off in immunisation rates. Measles is real, and really does kill. Outbreaks (and deaths) occur in inadequately protected communities. By your posturing would you want to be responsible for that? Now there would be a reason to cancel my subscription...*

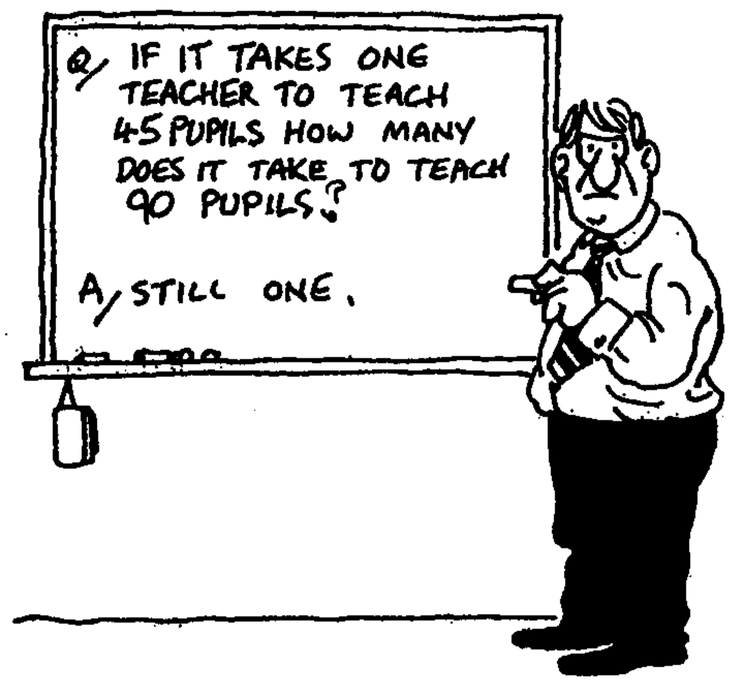
Yours faithfully,
DR ROB WHEATLEY,
Conslt. Paediatrician & father of 3 (fully immunised) children,
Blackpool.

Hill view

Sir,

Your attempt to over-simplify what was a highly complex complaint by Dr Prendergast about Panorama's report on the treatment of ME is worthy of complaint itself (Media News, Feb 23). Not only did you fail to point out that while upholding the complaint, the commission found no unfairness on several of Dr Prendergast's points, your report contained several innacuracies [sic] – not least the assertion that Panorama has moved to BBC2. It hasn't and remains BBC1's flagship current affairs programme.

MATTHEW HILL,
BBC Panorama.



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"All of a sudden they still keep playing that flat back four."
JOHN BERESFORD, Cafe Sport, Tyne Tees
(Justin Horton)

"You could be staring down the barrel of a gold medal."
ED HALL, BBC2
(Joe Taylor)

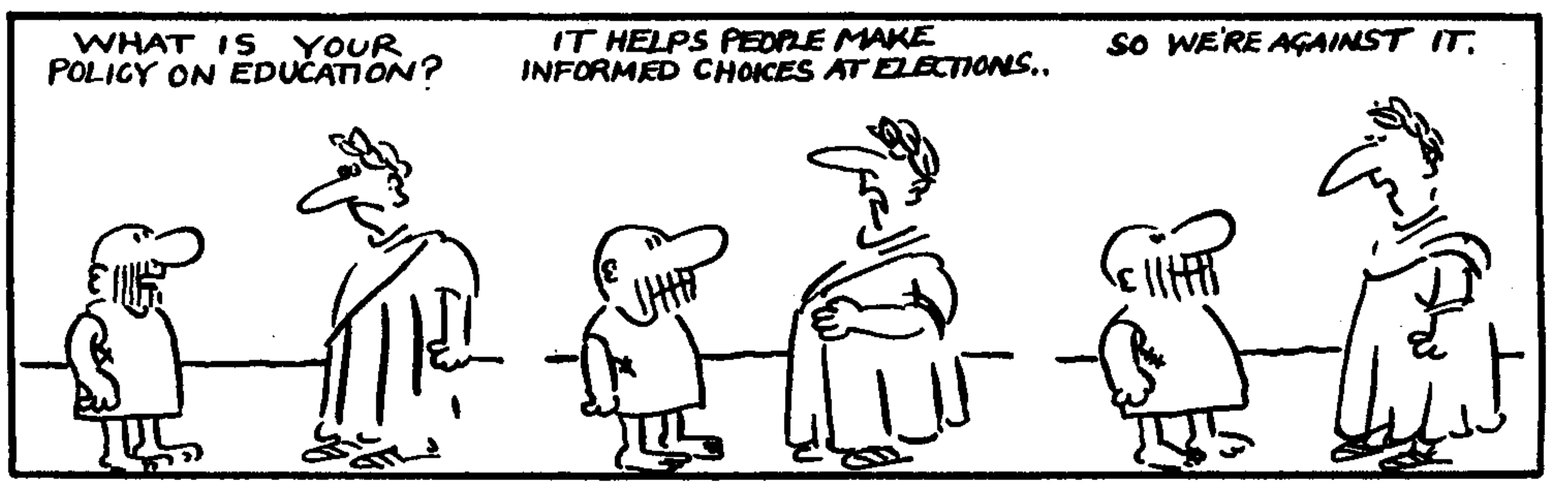
"It wasn't on the initial CD, it was on the one before that..."
JONATHAN ROSS, BBC Radio 2
(Mick Verrall)

"If it was a boxing match, you wouldn't know who was winning the game."
Football Commentator, ITV
(Terry Corrigan)

"And for those of you who haven't seen the statue [of the naked Madonna], I have a photograph here in front of me."
SUE MacGREGOR, Radio 4
(Monica Backes)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Tatarstan**
from Our Own Correspondent

ELECTION fever is in full swing here. We're choosing our president on 25 March and for weeks there's been little in our press but reports about the spontaneous enthusiasm voters are showing for the current incumbent, Mintimer Shaimiev (variously known as "Granddad", "the Tatar Khan" and "the former Chairman of the Tatar Supreme Soviet").

He wasn't going to stand for a third term (in accordance with the constitution), but apparently the demand from us, his beloved subjects, was so overwhelming he simply couldn't just retire and run his business empire in peace.

Although we're not in much doubt about the man most likely to win the election, it's less clear exactly what powers our leader will have. Granddad tells us that Tatarstan, 500 miles east of Moscow, is a sovereign republic which only cooperates with Russia on the basis of a treaty between the two states. But the word is that the folks in Moscow don't quite see things that way.

Rumours are flying that Shaimiev and Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, cooked up a deal where no one says anything about that awkward third term (out of a possible two) in return for Tatarstan not getting in the way of Russia "strengthening the verticals of state power". Not that it is easy to judge the truth of such accusations. Our notorious "State Inspectorate for the Defence of Press Freedom" has been in action lately, trying to clamp down on a new independent weekly.

One thing that does seem certain is that the new president won't be facing much in the way of rigorous parliamentary scrutiny. Despite a recent court ruling which suggests that many members of the State Council were not legitimately elected, and despite the almost unprecedented unity of everyone from the communists to the Union of Right-Wing Forces in an anti-Shaimiev "round table", the opposition today holds a grand total of one MP.

This hasn't stopped Granddad's friends from playing the nationality card in the run-up to polling day. "Sovereignty" talk is all the rage again – which means our government refusing to issue "imperial" Russian Federation passports to citizens of Tatarstan, along with the latest revival of the old threat to abandon Cyrillic and bring in a version of the Roman (ie Turkish) alphabet to write the Tatar language. This is guaranteed to provoke Moscow, although Tatarstan would probably never go through with it. For one thing, most ethnic Tatars live outside the republic, and if they suddenly couldn't read any of our books or magazines they might stop buying them – which would hurt not only our economy but also Granddad's hold over the Tatar diaspora, which is a vital element of his power base in clashes with the federal authorities. Besides, it's hardly as if Tatarstan could afford to reprint six decades' worth of literature without some state officials going short. The nationalists will have to remain satisfied for the time being with publishing articles in the pro-government press about anti-Tatar plots hatched by the local Jewish community.

Meanwhile Granddad is getting on with beautifying our capital, Kazan. Promises that we'd get an underground railway seem to have been put on hold, but no expense is being spared to give us a presidential palace of which any sovereign republic could be proud. They're even building a huge new mosque next to it. It is meant to be a reconstruction of one burned down by Ivan the Terrible, but as no one seems very sure what that one looked like, we should probably call it new. And only spoilsports would complain that the architecture is somehow out of keeping with its surroundings, near the 16th-century Annunciation Cathedral designed by the same mason who did St Basil's in Moscow. The money for this extravaganza, incidentally, comes from oil, with which Tatarstan is loaded – another possible reason for Putin to keep on Granddad's good side.

Despite the oil income, standards of living here have plunged over the past decade. While at least one government figure is said regularly to lose thousands of US dollars in his favourite casino, many people try to get by on $50 a month or less. Tuberculosis is reaching epidemic proportions among the poor. There were stories recently that the staff in some hospitals now wash their hands with washing powder because they can't afford to buy soap. But things could be worse. At least we have democracy.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

o "They say that necessity is the mother of invention," Istvan Beki told reporters at his parents' house in Miskolic, "and I've certainly proved it. My mother was ill, and I was in Budapest, more than 250km away, and I didn't have enough money for the train. The fare would have been over twenty thousand forints, and I just didn't have it, so I needed to find a much cheaper way to get home.

"Then I remembered that a friend had recently sent a trunkful of books through the mail, and had told me he'd been surprised at how cheap it was. That's when I had the idea. I got

a large cardboard box, perforated it for ventilation, then got inside with a bottle of water and some sandwiches, and presented myself at the post office counter. They were surprised, but there was nothing in the regulations against it, so I paid them 450 forints, pulled my top flaps down, and asked them to Sellotape me in. I was duly dispatched by surface mail, and arrived at my parents' house next day, safe and sound. Now I'm thinking of starting a low-cost travel business, to make the service available to all." *(Weekend Australian, 23/12/00. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

o"At first we were all wondering why anyone would want to insert a mobile phone into their rectum," Dr Elaine Weng of the Taipei Medical University Hospital told reporters. "I mean, it's not really a suitable shape, but the woman didn't want to tell us anything. She just said she'd sat on it accidentally, and was clearly very embarrassed, so we removed it, and didn't ask any more questions.

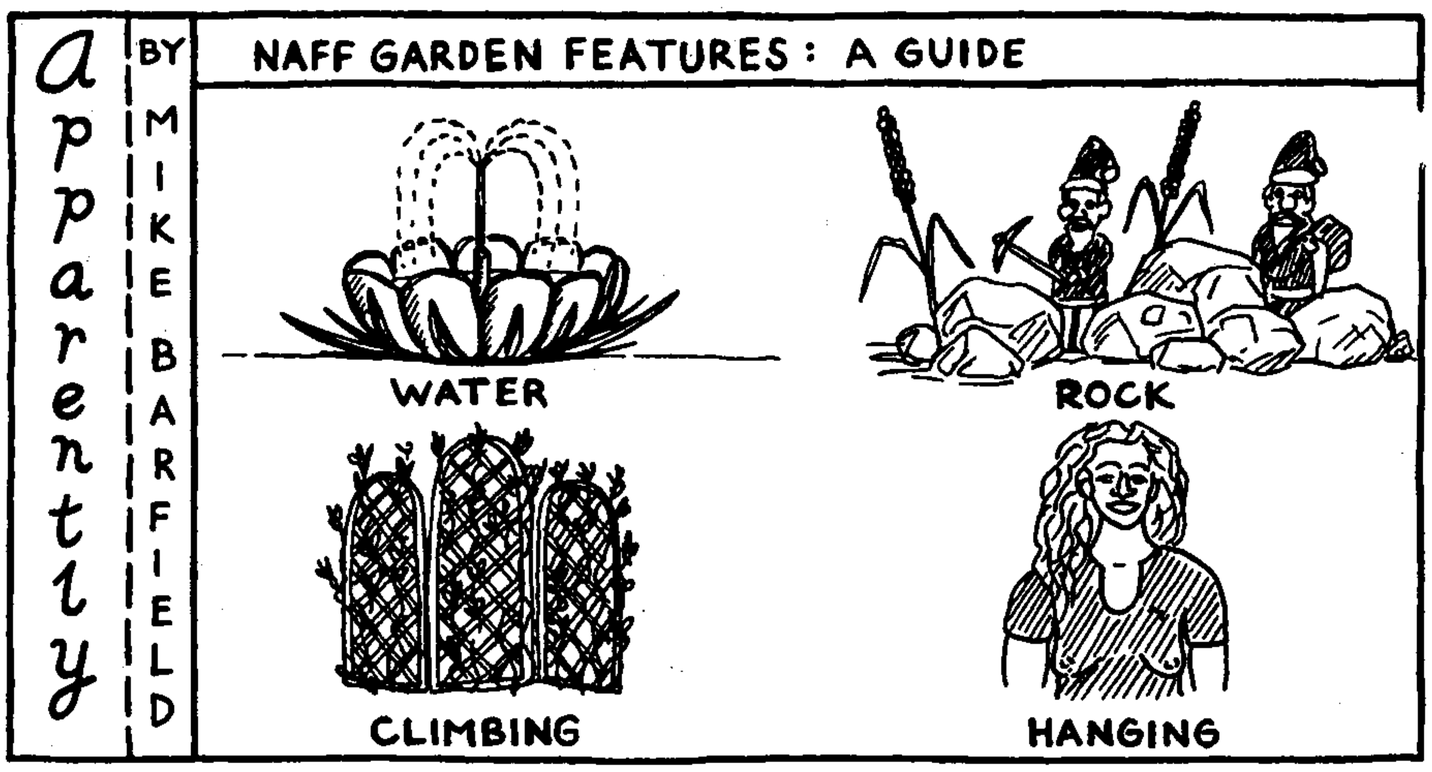
"But a few days later, another woman was rushed into Emergency with severe abdominal pains, and once again we found a mobile phone lodged in her rectum. It was the same model, a Nokia 8850, and when we asked her about it, she confessed what had happened. She'd been playing around with her boyfriend, and he'd switched on the vibrating function, inserted the phone into her anus, and then started dialling her number every few minutes 'as a game.' It wasn't the sort of game I'd play, because the phone gradually slipped deeper inside her, and he couldn't get it out afterwards. Apparently, the Nokia 8850 has a particularly strong vibrating function, but we really cannot recommend its use in this way. Radio signals can't do the lower colon a whole lot of good, but the trouble is, mobile phones are too slim nowadays, and some people get tempted." *(DPA, 14/2/01. Spotter: Andrew Baume)*

—o—

o *"There can be no progress without suffering," declared Lester Allison as he demonstrated his latest invention to bewildered onlookers in Durban. "My new box significantly lessens the impact on the groin area if a player is hit by a cricket ball. I'm convinced that it's a major improvement to cricketing safety."*

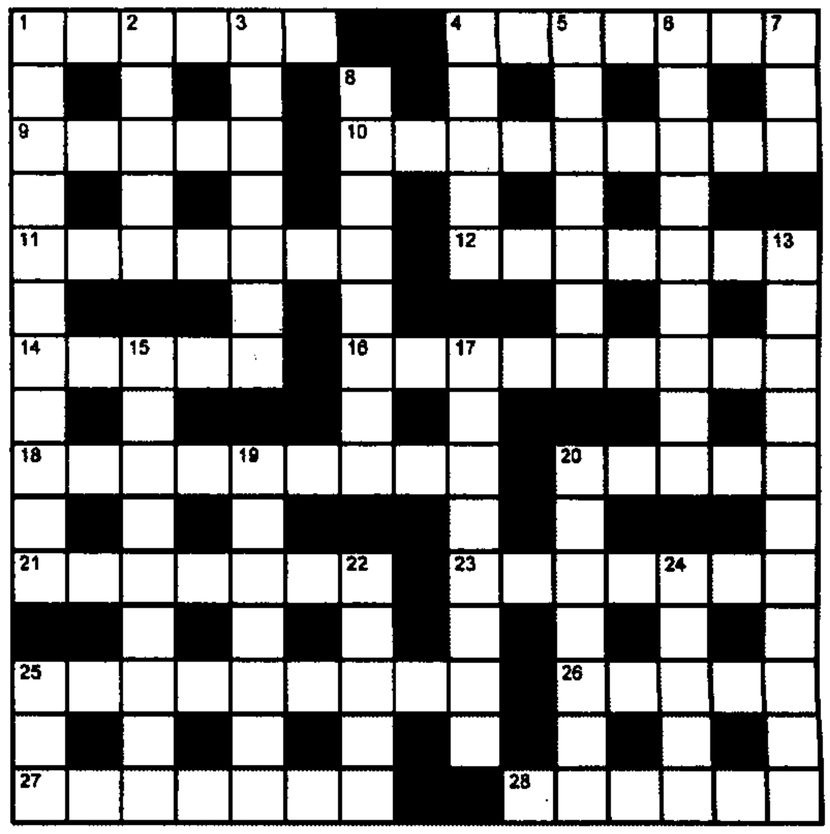
Allison, a thirty-five-year-old South African inventor, was showing off the prototype of his revolutionary new cricket box. Dressed only in a jock strap (and box), he continued: "As you can see, it fits snugly over the groin, and is equipped with a system of coiled springs, which absorb the momentum of the cricket ball. I originally tested it by hitting myself repeatedly in the groin with a bat, but I am now ready to demonstrate its efficacy by inviting all comers to bowl directly at my groin."

A few minutes later, Allison was carried off to hospital with severe groin injuries. (The Dominion [Wellington], 19/2/01. Spotter: Alan Ball)



EYE CROSSWORD 179

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1/10 Confined area to hall activity and trouser wearers' self-service (6,9)
4 Little good grabbing prick that's flashed (7)
9 Bacon and stuff? (5)
10 See 1ac.
11 Endless neck possessed by stupid Tory House member (7)
12 Image of President Bush finally into cigar misuse (7)
14 Gets rid of Posh during toss-off (5)
16 Hideous and lustful looking, for instance? (4,2,3)
18 Thrash the cat of one who ensures your member's present? (5,4)
20 See 25ac.
21 Sally is screwed by Tories, party leader included (7)
23 Tear organ and discharge (7)
25/20ac.They once scored high (6,3,5)
26 An occasion, of course, for women to be adventurous on top (5)
27 Dick to tackle the DIY set (7)
28 Endorsed party does U-turn, suppressing a key change (6)

DOWN

1 "What Labour is: shit" – Brenda's spoiler (5,6)
2 What got into Monica, stuffing one large sum in a jam jar? (5)
3 Informers – just what aural hair losers need? (7)
4 Its residents forced to endure Labour – leader diminished, a joke, round the bend, novice (5)
5 Tale of an old politician getting Blair initially besieged by motorists (3, 4)
6 Complaint about Royal Opera House being in farcical crisis (9)
7 Insult what belonged to a revered Royal? (3)
8 OTT, non-PC young woman to a large extent (1,3,4)
13 'No shit' description of party politician's hint to an ex-leader (11)
15 It's torture when members rise, and expand with love (9)
17 SDLP are about to accept one acts as suggested by a campaigning Bush (3-5)
19 Kay upset about sham broadcast public cover-up (7)
20 Be like Archer to the end — and give England some thought? (3,4)
22 Bill's successor follows former, alike in every way (5)
24 Sly's character, unstable (5)
25 Nevertheless there's no time for arse (3)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 30.3.01. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.

Solution to Crossword No. 178

Winner: ERIC THURLEY

ACROSS: 1 Smoke bomb 6 Bravo 9 Lotus 10 Jockstrap 11 Eyelash 12 Belly up 13/17 Tradesman's entrance 15 Cher 18 Meek 19 Washington 22 Sex bomb 24 Hard-ons 25 Scrambler 27 Saxon 28 Scapegoat.

DOWN: 1 Solvent 2 On the game 3 Enslaved 4 Oojah 5 Backbench 6 Bustle 7/26 Airey Neave 8 On paper 14 Meatballs 16 Hot potato 18 Misuses 20 No sweat 21 Conman 23 Xerox 24 Horsa.

Review Of The Circumstances Surrounding The Attempt By Mr S.P. Hinduja To Pressure Ministers Into Granting Him A UK Passport In Exchange For £1 Million

by Sir Wally Whitewash QC, OBN

Introduction

To The Prime Minister

1.1 You asked me to investigate the above matter with the following terms of reference:

i) to exonerate all Her Majesty's Ministers and ex-Ministers of any impropriety or wrongdoing whatsoever.

ii) to exonerate all Her Majesty's civil servants likewise

iii) er... that's it.

Report

Mr Mandelson and The Phone Call

2.1 It was widely claimed in the media that on February 23 1998, Mr Peter Mandelson, then Secretary of State For The Dome, rang a Home Office Minister, Mr Michael O'Booze, and asked him to "hurry up with that passport for my good friend O.J. Hinduja".

2.2 Although Mr O'Booze maintains that such a call was made, Mr Mandelson assures me that he had "forgotten all about it".

2.3 When Mr Mandelson subsequently denied that he had forgotten all about it on Tyne-Tees TV's "Good Morning Hartlepool" Show, he explained to me that he had only done so because of a momentary lapse of memory due to the strain he had been under at the time because of the pressure on him to get a passport for Mr Hinduja.

2.4 I am entirely satisfied with Mr Mandelson's account of this episode, and that he has behaved with perfect rectitude at all times.

The Memo From Mr Straw

3.1 On July 21st 1998, Mr Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, sent a memorandum to Mr Julian Penpusher, the Chief Executive of Passportforce (formerly HM Passport Office), asking him to make sure that Mr O.K. Hinduja's application for a UK passport was dealt with in a "helpful" manner.

3.2 When I spoke to Mr Straw, who very kindly agreed to put aside two minutes of his valuable time to talk to me, he explained that the word "helpful" was a shorthand expression for "properly, according to procedures". It was intended to convey to Mr Penpusher the message that Mr Hinduja's application should be treated like any other application from a rich businessman who had just given £1 million to the Dome.

3.3 I am entirely satisfied that Mr Penpusher, a diligent and conscientious civil servant, in no way showed any favouritism in his handling of the application, and it was purely coincidental that Mr Hinduja received his passport by return of post.

3.4 I am also entirely satisfied that the conduct of my boss Mr Straw, a delightful, charming and decent man, was in every way above suspicion and beyond reproach. The fact that Mr Straw noted in the margin of Mr Hinduja's application "Zola Budd" was no more than an attempt to answer the clue for 17 Down in that day's Daily Telegraph crossword "French novelist meets Britten's maritime hero, to produce South African runner of the early 1980s (4,4).

Mr Blair Is Innocent

4.1 It has been suggested in the media that the Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair may in some way have been overhasty in accepting the recommendation of his Press Secretary Mr Alastair Campbell that Mr Mandelson should be booted out without delay for being a major embarrassment to the Government when there was an election coming up.

4.2 I am fully satisfied that these allegations are entirely outside the frame of reference laid down for this enquiry by the Prime Minister and his Press Secretary Mr Campbell.

4.3 I am therefore fully satisfied that both these outstanding public servants acted throughout with the exemplary integrity, and their conduct throughout this episode has been one of unimpeachable sanctity.

4.4 Vote Labour.

4.5 Will this do?

SIR WALTER WHITEWASH
(shortly to be Lord Whitewash)

Annexe 1

1.1 I am aware that I may be accused of having perpetrated in this report a cover-up of unprecedented feebleness.

1.2 I have looked carefully into this matter and have interviewed myself at length on this point.

1.3 I am entirely happy with the assurances I have given myself and that I have acted at all times with the best interests of the Government at heart.

1.4 I am entirely satisfied with myself.

LIVES OF THE SAINTS

No. 94 St Peter of Tatchell

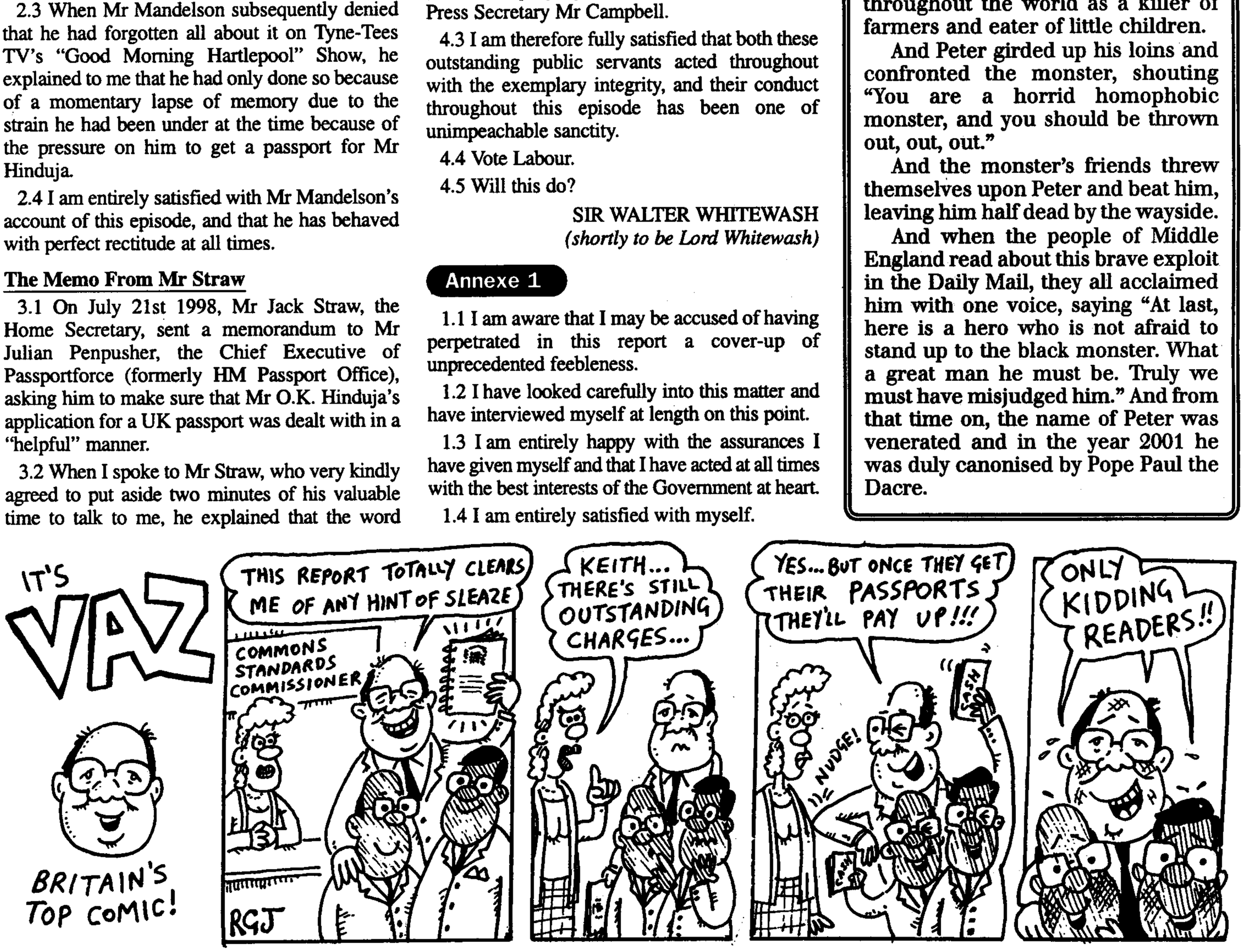
AND there lived in those days an humble homosexual named Peter, who was universally reviled for his unseemly outbursts in church on behalf of his likeminded brethren. On one occasion he even defiled the ancient Cathedral of Canterbury, by ejecting the Archbishop from his own pulpit in the middle of a sermon. And all the godly and righteous folk of Middle England abjured Peter and execrated his name as a creature of Sodom.

But one day a miracle occurred. Peter journeyed to the city of Brussels, where there was dwelling a most-hated monster, the Mugabe. And the Mugabe was feared throughout the world as a killer of farmers and eater of little children.

And Peter girded up his loins and confronted the monster, shouting "You are a horrid homophobic monster, and you should be thrown out, out, out."

And the monster's friends threw themselves upon Peter and beat him, leaving him half dead by the wayside.

And when the people of Middle England read about this brave exploit in the Daily Mail, they all acclaimed him with one voice, saying "At last, here is a hero who is not afraid to stand up to the black monster. What a great man he must be. Truly we must have misjudged him." And from that time on, the name of Peter was venerated and in the year 2001 he was duly canonised by Pope Paul the Dacre.


IT'S VAZ
BRITAIN'S TOP COMIC!
THIS REPORT TOTALLY CLEARS ME OF ANY HINT OF SLEAZE
COMMONS STANDARDS COMMISSIONER
RGJ
KEITH... THERE'S STILL OUTSTANDING CHARGES...
YES... BUT ONCE THEY GET THEIR PASSPORTS THEY'LL PAY UP!!!
NUDGE!
ONLY KIDDING READERS!!

PIGS AT RISK AS DISEASE SPREADS

"How many farms do you want to buy?"

by Our Agricultural Staff
Paul Foot-and-Mouth

A VIRULENT epidemic of "Snout and Trough" disease threatens to overwhelm the country as yet another case has been confirmed in Westminster.

A prize Leicester Vaz pig (named Keith and weighing 17 stone) was found displaying the classic symptoms of the plague. He had traces of money all over his hands and was spotted stumbling over his explanation.

"The tell-tale signs were there for all to see," said a vet. "Keith was really lame and he didn't have a leg to stand on."

PORKIES

There were calls for Keith to be slaughtered immediately, but the authorities are refusing, on the grounds that if they cull Keith then they will have to destroy all the rest of the swine.

APOLOGY

IN COMMON with all other newspapers, our City pages may have given the impression over the last two years that an investment in high-technology and telecommunications shares was in some way desirable, if not essential.

Headlines such as "Buy! Buy! Buy!", "We're all going dotty.com!" and "It's money for old rope!" may have led readers to believe that a high-tec/telecom stockmarket portfolio constituted an exciting investment opportunity.

We now accept unreservedly that such was not the case and that, in truth, the entire dotcom frenzy was a speculative bubble inflated by the media which was guaranteed to lead to a stockmarket collapse with its attendant personal distress to unwary investors.

We apologise to anyone who lost their money, but regret that no refund will be available.

ON OTHER PAGES ● "Bye! Bye! Bye!" ● "It's A Dot.Con!" ● "Hang yourself with our free rope!"

All nasty smears and stains will disappear immediately with the wonder-new ingredient

FILKIN-PLUS

"It doesn't matter how dirty everything gets," says stay-at-home father-of-three Tony B, "at the end of the day it looks whiter-than-white."

When asked if he would accept the Vaz Challenge and swap his Vaz for another band of politician, T.B. said "No way. I'm sticking with Vaz!"

This advertisement has been issued by Blindman & Co, Advertising Agents and Commissioners of Oaths.

GLENDA SLAGG

Fleet Street's celebrity Big Sister?!?!

HATS OFF to the greatest television programme ever!! Celebrity Big Brother!?!? Weren't you glued to the box like me??!?! Don't deny it, mister!!? As we followed the roller-coaster emotional ride of TV's Chris, Anthea, Vanessa, Clare and the other one, we laughed, we cried, we cried and we laughed. Thank you, thank you, Comic Relief!!! Let's have it all again sooo-ooo-ooon!!?!

HOW LOW can television stoop?!? If this is entertainment, Gawd help us!?! I'd rather watch sheep being culled than this bunch of D-List nobodies parading their sick little egos for our benefit?!? So awful was this excruciating exercise in dumbed-down box-goggling that I was unable to get out of my chair and turn it off!?!

If this is the best you can do, Comic Relief, you can take your red nose and stuff it you know where!?!!

VANESSA FELTZ!?! Aren'tchasick-ofher?!! A-sobbin' and a-blobbin' in the Big Brother house!?! Go bonkers in your own home, Fatty, and don't force us to sit through your nervous breakdown!?!!

THREE CHEERS for Vanessa — the larger than life lady who had the courage to let it all hang out on our TV screens for charity!?! OK, so her hair kept falling in the soup and she wrote barmy graffiti everywhere!?! But at least she showed us that she was a real warm human being underneath the mask of celebrity?!? As they say, Feltz by name, Heart Feltz by nature!?!

ANTHEA TURNER – don'tchahate-her?!?

ANTHEA TURNER – don'tchaluv-her?!?

JACK DEE – Er... *(Write about something else or you're fired. Ed.)*

SPARE A THOUGHT for P-Y Gerbeau, the fun-loving Frenchman with the hedgehog hair who captured the hearts of nobody when running the poor old Dome!?!

Let's hope it's au revoir and not goodbye!?!

Come on, Your Maj, give him a title. Lord Gerbil of Greenwich has a nice ring to it, n'est-ce pas?!?

P-Y GERBEAU — what a loser!?! Fancy thinking he could get anyone to go to the rotten old Dome!?! With his silly grin and his horrible garlic breath, no wonder no one went there!?!

Go on, hop off back to France, Monsieur Froggie, and don't come back!?!

HERE THEY are — Glenda's Football Fellas!?!

GEORGE GRAHAM. Tottenham have given him the sack — and my sack's ready for him too!?!

LEE BOWYER. So you don't wear any underwear!?! Nor do I, Mister!!?!

SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON. Crazy name, boring guy!?!?

Byeeee!!

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam

So. Farewell then
Those Buddhist statues
Blown up by
The Taliban.

Now I will never
Be able to see
You.
Not that I would have done
Anyway.

Because I had never heard
Of you
Until you were
Destroyed.

Keith said "This is a very
Buddhist paradox."
But then he took too much
Acid at college
And he may have got this
Wrong.

Sri Jay Thribb
(17½ reincarnations)

Police seek witnesses to assault

Richmond Borough Guardian

■ **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE YAWN?**

■ **WHY DO OUR EYELIDS CLOSE WHEN WE ARE WATCHING TV?**

■ **WHAT SIGNAL DOES "SNORING" SEND OUT?**

THE BBC IS PROUD TO PRESENT ITS 7-PART, £200 MILLION LANDMARK DOCUMENTARY SERIES

THE FACE OF BOREDOM

presented by one of the world's greatest living experts on the psychology of human physiognomy. Professor ***Jonathan Cleese***

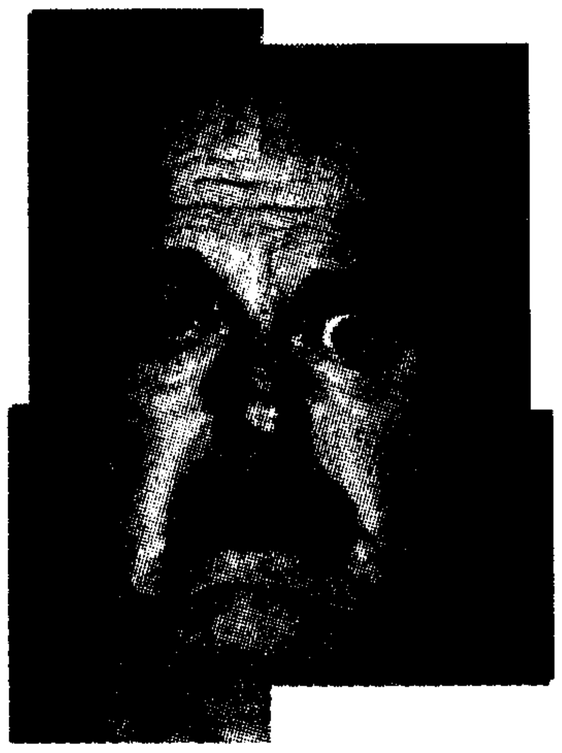
(Silly music – montage of Calcutta, San Francisco, Sydney Opera House and Great Wall of China. Cut to man with moustache and white coat standing in lecture theatre)

John Cleese *(for it is he)*: There are over 450,000 tiny muscles that create what we call the human face. Between them they can produce an astonishing 5 million different facial expressions. This is what marks us out from all other animals. The humble earthworm, for example *(Cut to film of earthworm)* has no means to communicate its feelings to other earthworms. It can't even smile when I make jokes about Michael Palin. *(Earthworm curls up and dies)* But we human beings are different.

Our faces are a constantly changing landscape of our emotions. For instance, most of you watching will be showing expressions such as this *(Shot of man looking profoundly bored)*

Or this *(Shot of another man looking intensely irritated)*

So, in order to change your expression, I'm going to bring on my assistant, Liz Hurley.



(Sultry star of stage, screen and Daily Telegraph enters and makes funny face at Cleese)

Cleese: Here we see how a sexy human face can be used in a desperate and in this case unsuccessful attempt to keep people awake!

(Music changes from silly to sentimental)

Desmond Wilcleese: Sadly, not everyone has the means to smile, even at the very funniest material.

(Shot of teenage boy looking blankly at video of "Dead Python" sketch from "Monty Parrot's Boring Circus")

Esther Cleese: Young Kevin has never been able to smile at this sketch. He has the muscles, but they don't work. He feels excluded from his peer group.

Kevin's Mother: He feels excluded from his peer group. It's rotten for him. All the other boys are creased up with laughter and poor Kevin doesn't laugh at all.

(Cut to Cleese in Toronto)

Cleese: Yet fortunately now something can be done for the Kevins of this world.

(Shot of large sign outside modern hospital reading "Toronto Institute For The Rehabiliation Of Facio-Muscular Responses. Director: Dr Jonathan Muller". Cut to inside hospital where mad German professor administers laughing gas to Kevin)

Cleese: The effects are extraordinary!

(Shot of Kevin rolling helplessly on floor with laughter and repeating "This programme is no more. It is a dead programme. It has ceased to be." Cut to Cleese)

Cleese: Next week, while you're watching something else, I shall be interviewing Desmond Morris about how he used to do this kind of stuff back in the 1970s. And of course Liz Hurley will be here again taking off her clothes (only joking!).

(More silly music. Shot of people walking up and down street in New York. Titles read: "We would like to thank the following international companies for putting up the money to make this series possible: WDJD – Nevada, XQJ – Milwaukee, The Canadian Dull Channel, Inuit TV, The National TV Archive of Perth, WA, BBC Digital Worldwide Choice")

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

SIR PAUL McCARTNEY

Have you ever had a dream about spoons?

No, I don't think so, but George once told me he had a dream about a spoon.

And did anything come of it?

We were going to do a song about it, but then we didn't.

Are you comfortable with spoons?

By and large I think I am. I used to have a bit of a hang-up about them when I was younger, you know, was I using the right sort of spoon and that. But as you get older, you just, you know...

As a left-hander, do you have any special spoons?

Well, Heather actually bought me a left-handed spoon from that shop in Soho for my birthday. It's got like my name on it. Fantastic!

Did the Beatles ever argue about spoons?

We argued about a lot of things, as is common knowledge now, through all the anthologies and books and stuff that we bring out about ourselves.

What do you think your spoons say about you?

It's an old Hindu belief that everything you possess is part of your identity – clothes, shoes, even your spoons, I suppose. Everything has meaning.

So, what is the meaning of spoons?

I recently published a book of poems all about the meaning of everything, really. There's nothing specific about spoons, though there is a poem about the day I left my Buddy Holly record on a bus.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No.

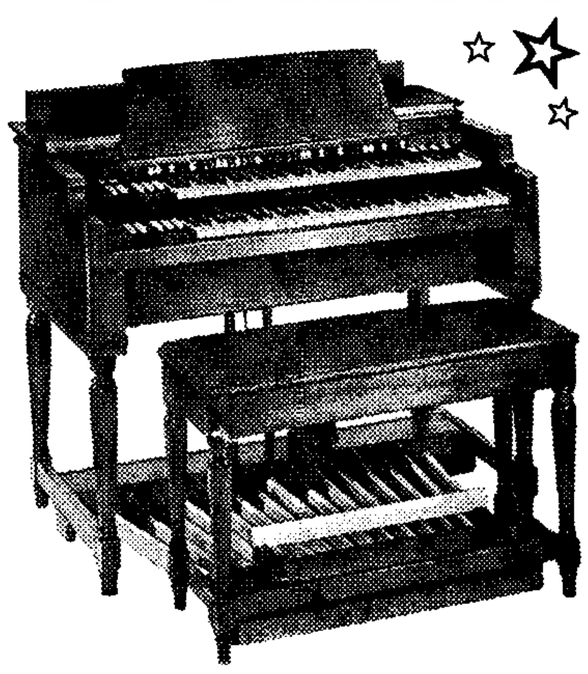
NEXT WEEK: Prince Michael of Kent.

YOBS

HUSBAND

"Poor old Piglet"

THE *NEW* SIR ANTHONY HAMMOND ORGAN



Just program it and it plays any tune you want

♫ *All your favourite melodies including*

● *A Whiter Shade Of Wash* ● *Knights In White Washing*
● *I'm Going To Whitewash That Mandy Right Out Of My Blair*

And many, many more... ♫

The Sir Anthony Hammond Organ
– not nearly as costly as it seems at first!

POLLY FILLER

A NEW so-called report claims that the children of working women get worse A-Level results than those of women who stay at home. Well, thanks a lot! As if us high-achieving career supermums haven't got enough on our plates, along comes this study (produced no doubt by ***male*** academics), which tries to unload another bucket of guilt in our in-trays.

Well, I'm sorry – I'm not going back to being the little woman at home, ironing Simon's underpants and cleaning up Charlie's sick. What do you think au-pairs are for?

And, for your information, Charlie is exceptionally well-balanced, has a reading age of 9fi (not bad for a four-year-old!) and his teachers are already asking us if we have put his name down for Oxbridge.

And that is entirely down to yours truly putting in the essential "quality time" or, as I call it, "Charlie time"!

Because although during the day I may be "Polly Filler, top columnist, writer and broad-caster", when I get through the door I'm just "Polly Filler, 100% mum".

And I'm fiercely protective about this. Nothing comes between me and my undiluted 40 minutes a day of "total C.T." (Charlie Time!).

It's a strict routine. As soon as I get home at 6.30pm we flop down together in front of "Cow and Chicken" on the Cartoon Network. At the end of it Charlie wakes me up and asks for a story. So, of course, I put on the story tape. (After all, the useless Simon is hardly going to apply himself to reading Harry Potter aloud when he's too busy watching "Hoover Wars" on E4 with Paul Ross and Angela Rippon.)

After ten minutes' solid literary skill development (and a much needed G&T for myself) it's off to Bedfordshire – or wherever else we've been invited to dinner.

Charlie goes straight to sleep and I can go out with a clean conscience. But, hey, don't get me wrong. I'm no saint! Like other busy mums with hectic schedules and high profile lifestyles, I sometimes have to juggle things around. Some nights (probably no more than a few times a week) even I can't avoid those "must-go" events: parties, launches, openings, gym sessions, girlie get-togethers and poker nights at the Groucho! So, I just have to put "Polly Filler, Mum" on hold while "Polly Filler, Breadwinner" earns the money for the luxuries in Charlie's life. Like staying in a fabulous Children's Hotel in Dorset while Simon and I go for a weekend's shopping in New York.

AND, another thing... if mothers didn't go out to work then think of the consequences. Our au-pair Irina would be at home in Slovenia looking after her kids instead of taking Charlie to McDonald's and allowing me to write this column. Think about it.

© Polly Filler.

COURT CIRCULAR

GATCOMBE PARK

March 13: Her Royal Highness the Princess Anne will today be inspecting the Brockworth Bypass between Hartpury and Cirencester and will be visiting the outside lane at a speed of 93 mph. In attendance will be PC Mike Doughnut and WPC Pam Sandwich who will escort the Princess Royal for 7 miles. She will eventually stop on the hard shoulder where she will be formally presented with a £400 speeding ticket as a memento of her trip. She will later make an appearance opening a police station which will give everybody a very good laugh.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS — BY BIRCH

It's an outrage!
An unforgivable affront!
POLICE RAID SAATCHI GALLERY
INSPECTOR KNACKER-TADEMA
I've put on my most provocative show yet, and they've completely ignored it!
Even after my tip-off!

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And a special hullo to all of you who have written to me in recent months (and e-mailed me!) sharing your worries about the odd thing or two which may have gone wrong in the parish.

Not that I for a moment accept that anything serious is going wrong with the parish. And, honestly, from the tone of some of your letters, you would think that the world was coming to an end and that the Four Horsemen (or Horsepersons! Thanks, Cherie) of the Apocalypse were roaming across the land spreading destruction in their wake.

Not of course that they would be allowed to roam around St Albion's at the moment, thanks to the ban on movement around the parish imposed by Mr Nick Brown as part of his very sensible measures to protect us all from the farmers!

Look, let's face it, it's easy to get the impression that things are going wrong, when we see a lot of rather sensational stories in the papers about cows burning, trains crashing, old ladies lying on trolleys in hospital corridors, toddlers being sent home from school because their teachers are on strike, and the police failing to catch any criminals.

But, you know, this is not the real story of what is happening in our parish, is it? As you look around your own sitting room, do you see any old folk being left to die on trolleys?

As you look around your garden do you see any trains crashing or cows burning?

Of course not! Let's get these things in perspective, shall we?

The parish is doing fantastically well! As we saw last week, when Mr Brown presented our latest accounts, we've got more money in the bank than ever before (well done, Gordon, for putting some of my ideas into practice at last!).

Everyone has got jobs, class sizes at St Albion's Primary School are down to record levels (well done, Mr Blunkett!)

and the waiting list at our Cottage Hospital has been cut to only 10 years. Not a bad set of achievements, is it?

Hey, this is a record anyone could be proud of! So the kind person who keeps sending me a text-message on my mobile saying "UR NBG VCR BGGR OFF!" should eat his abbreviated words. (Thanks for the joke, Mr O'Farrell!)

And that's also why, whatever the gloom-and-doom merchants may say, I have no intention of postponing this year's very important PCC elections, just because one or two disaffected people from outlying parts of the parish can't get in to vote (or do I mean "disinfected people"? – another cracker from Mr O'Farrell, St Albion's official new "Joker Laureate"!)

The point is that May is a very special month for me and Cherie. It is the month when you chose me as your vicar in 1997.

May is the month when Cherie chose to give the parish little Leo!

And don't let's forget that May 1st (or is 3rd?) is New Labour Day, when we celebrate the birth of the new and the death of the old by dancing round the maypole!

In fact, I have written a special chorus to be sung at Evensong:

The May Poll
What a wonderful month is May!
When you all can have your say!
Take up your cross!
Put it down by "the boss"!
And hip, hip, hip, hooray! (Repeat)

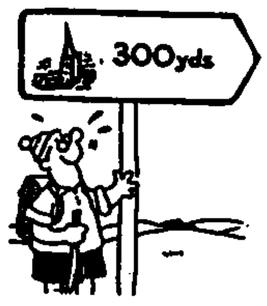
© Words and music T. Blair.

Yours,

Tony

Rambling Club

Round And About The Parish With Mick Meacher



The days are lengthening, Spring is in the air and the crocuses and daffodils are showing their welcome little heads above the ground. Time, you think, to get out into the country and enjoy a good walk! I couldn't agree more, and that's why, even though there are a few minor restrictions just at present, there is no reason for us all to stay moping at home!

Here is my recommended *"Ramble of the Week"*, drawn up with the help of the AA and MAFF.

1. Walk from your house to your car, enjoying the view.

2. Drive to assembly point – Junction 29 (clockwise) of the M94 – to meet up with fellow ramblers.

3. Drive off round M94, appreciating breathtaking view of animals being burnt out of window.

4. 1300-1400 hrs. Meet for lunch at Little Chef by Junction 71. There will be an opportunity to buy souvenirs of the countryside from the Q8 minimart at Oondatje service station.

5. Complete tour of M94, enjoying further views of country life, farmers hanging themselves, etc.

6. 1630-1700 hrs. Tea break at the "Old McDonald's Drive-Thru" (Junction 106).

7. Drive home, and enjoy bracing walk from garage to living room (not forgetting to dip feet in disinfectant bath on the way!).

What You Should Take With You

Stout pair of driving shoes
Warm gloves
Copy of Sunday Telegraph to read in traffic jams.

Happy Rambling!
Mike Meacher

Kids Corner

Nick Brown writes:

Thanks to all of you who joined in my light-hearted competition to come up with a cheery cartoon about our little problems in the countryside. The winner is Pete Donohue, with a lovely look on the bright side! N.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

Could I use your columns to express my profound thanks to my good friend Mr Hammond for so comprehensively clearing my name over the signing of Mr Hinduja's passport form.

As I have said all along, I did nothing wrong, but in no way do I feel any resentment towards my old friend the Vicar for having so understandably sacked me for doing nothing wrong, and I look forward to him keeping his side of the bargain after the PCC elections!

Peter Mandelson,
Hinduja Mansions,
Notting Hill Grove.

PS. Make sure this letter goes in in full, Alastair, or your days are numbered! P.M.

MY BLAIR LADDY

by Our Showbiz Staff
Ned Twinky

THE MILLION pound revival of "My Blair Laddy" finally hit the stage last night to rapturous applause. Amidst a glittering cast, the undoubted star was actor Tony Blair with his triumphant performance playing the public school toff who has to learn how to speak badly to get on in the world.

Critics were unanimous in their praise of Blair's transformation. The character starts off saying "The rain in Tuscany falls mainly in the swimming pool", but then he drops his aitches and says "What's wrong wiv Butlins for a fortnight?! Lawks-a-mercy, me old china plate!?! Vote Labour – you know I'm a diamond geezer."

The audience were delighted and sang along with

- **The Downing Street where you live.**
- **I'm getting elected in the morning.**
- **Get me to the polling booth on time.**
- **Why can't a Mandy be more like a woman?**

LATE NEWS

The Ascot scene has been cancelled due to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.

HAGUE DEMANDS ELECTION DELAY

by Our Political Staff **Simon Heiffer**

WILLIAM HAGUE today called for an indefinite postponement of the General Election due to the current crisis.

"It would be grossly irresponsible for people to come out of their homes and vote Labour," said Mr Hague. "It would be far more sensible to wait until the crisis is over when conditions are more favourable to us and these terrible problems are at an end."

Experts are predicting that if the current disaster continues then there will be losses of hundreds of seats and there will be barely one Conservative left alive.

GILLIAN SHEPHERD

Said one heartbroken Conservative land-owner, "Once I could look out of my window and see flocks of Tories driving to the station and buying a copy of the Daily Telegraph to read on the train.

"Now they are all gone and the trains don't stop here any more. I am devastated. All my life's work has gone up in smoke."

LATE NEWS

Very Rare Old Boar Threatened

One of the country's only surviving Salisbury Boars (Grocerus Porkus), affectionately known as Ted, could be another victim in the latest culling. Now over 100 stone, the famous old Boar has been a popular favourite for years with nobody at all.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY

English Language And Literature

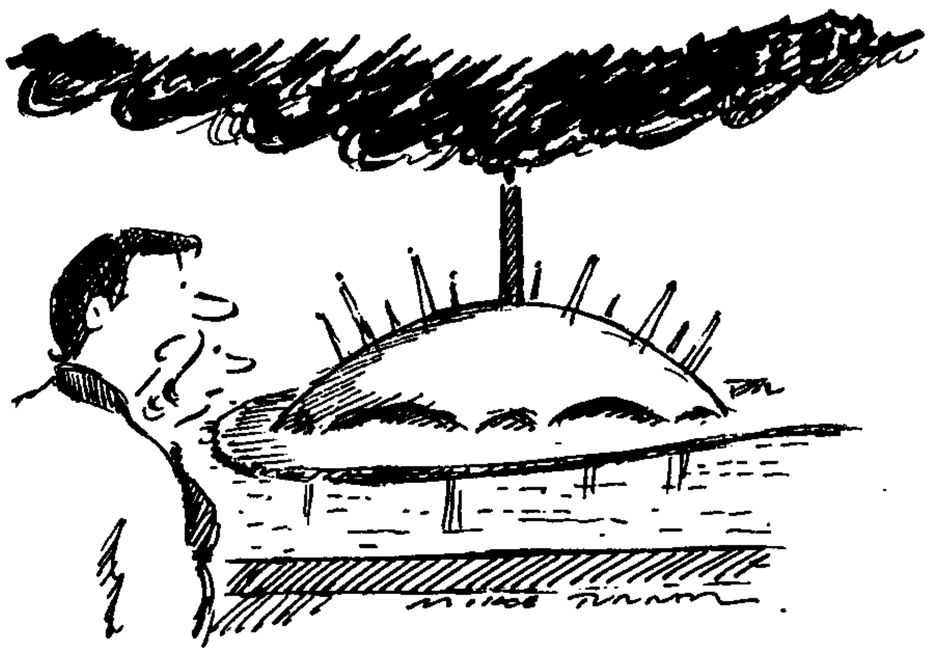
Finals

(Set by Professor John Bayley)

1. Imagine that you are an elderly don formerly married to a famous novelist but now short of a bob or two. Describe, in your own words, a pathetic sexual fantasy in which various women get into bed with you.
2. Analyse the relationship between fact and fiction in English Literature, with special reference to *Keeping It Up* by J. Bayley (2001).
3. "The Telegraph has really wasted its money this time." Discuss.
4. Is Alzheimer's contagious?

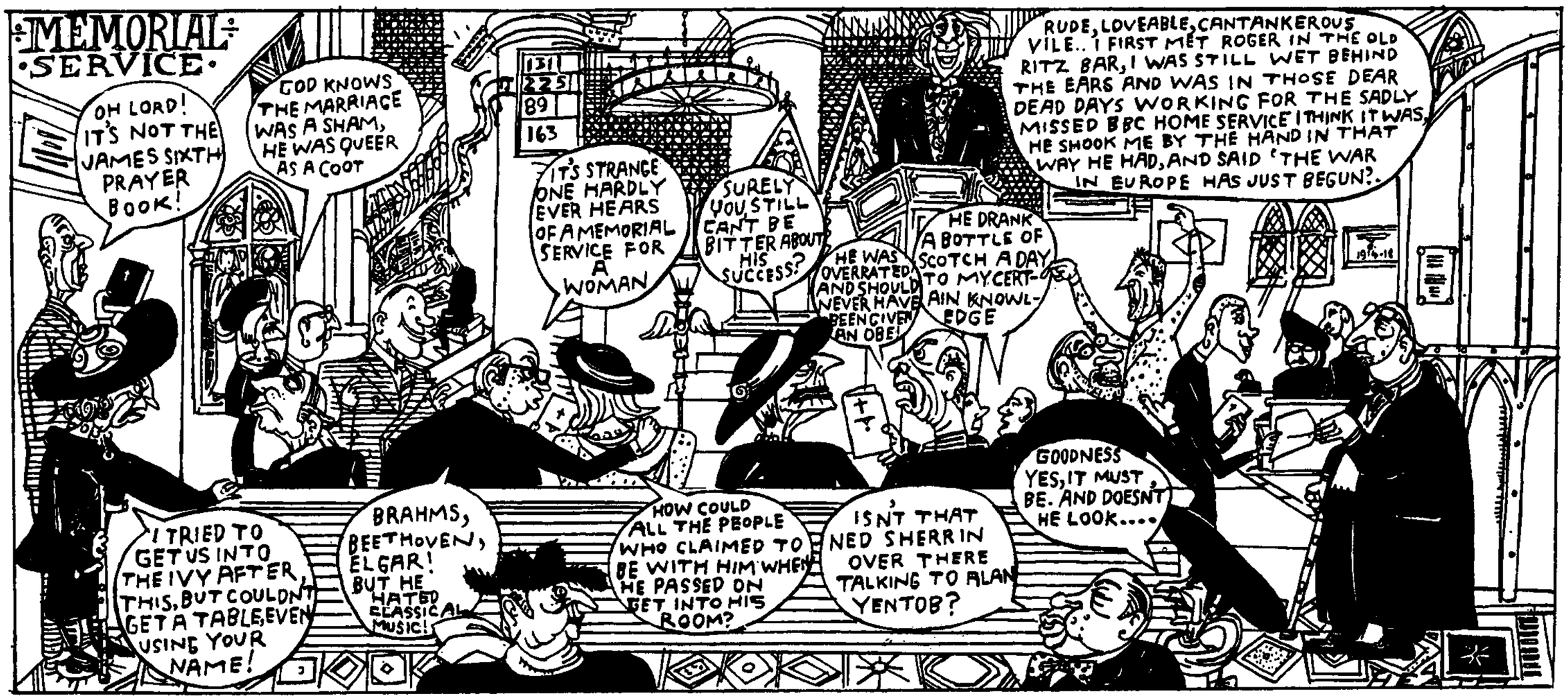
Time allowed: ten minutes.
Send completed papers to Charles Moore, Editor, The Bayley Telegraph, Canary Wharf, enclosing a large invoice.

101 Uses For A Dome (Final)



Incinerator

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW


MEMORIAL SERVICE
OH LORD! IT'S NOT THE JAMES SIXTH PRAYER BOOK!
GOD KNOWS THE MARRIAGE WAS A SHAM, HE WAS QUEER AS A COOT
131
225
89
163
IT'S STRANGE ONE HARDLY EVER HEARS OF A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR A WOMAN
SURELY YOU STILL CAN'T BE BITTER ABOUT HIS SUCCESS?
HE WAS OVERRATED AND SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN GIVEN AN OBE!
HE DRANK A BOTTLE OF SCOTCH A DAY TO MY CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE
RUDE, LOVEABLE, CANTANKEROUS VILE.. I FIRST MET ROGER IN THE OLD RITZ BAR, I WAS STILL WET BEHIND THE EARS AND WAS IN THOSE DEAR DEAD DAYS WORKING FOR THE SADLY MISSED BBC HOME SERVICE I THINK IT WAS, HE SHOOK ME BY THE HAND IN THAT WAY HE HAD, AND SAID 'THE WAR IN EUROPE HAS JUST BEGUN'.
1914-18
I TRIED TO GET US INTO THE IVY AFTER, THIS, BUT COULDN'T GET A TABLE, EVEN USING YOUR NAME!
BRAHMS, BEETHOVEN, ELGAR! BUT HE HATED CLASSICAL MUSIC!
HOW COULD ALL THE PEOPLE WHO CLAIMED TO BE WITH HIM WHEN HE PASSED ON GET INTO HIS ROOM?
ISN'T THAT NED SHERRIN OVER THERE TALKING TO ALAN YENTOB?
GOODNESS YES, IT MUST BE. AND DOESN'T HE LOOK....

DIARY

CAROLE STONE

Yes, it's been a roller-coaster ride, that's for sure! I was born the daughter of a milkman on a council estate – but I rose to become one of London's most glittering hostesses, operating my own legendary salon, with a network database of over 14,000 friends to make use of, including Maureen Lipman, Robert Kilroy-Silk, Jeremy Beadle, Lord Cecil Parkinson, Chris Kelly from BBC's top-rating Food and Drink, Eve Pollard, and The Hon Charles Gripfix, of glue magnate fame. These are the sort of high-profile friends and contacts who enjoy rubbing shoulders at my high-octane parties. An impressive list – and one to excite envy in those of you stuck in dead-end jobs, with only a list of ten or so friends, most of them totally unknown.

So HOW, you will be asking, did I do it? How did I make friends of this quality, many of them movers and shakers in the top-flight worlds of politics, arts or entertainment.

SENDING OUT INVITATIONS. People always drop out on the day, so you should risk inviting more than you can really handle. For my parties, I reckon to invite 100 guests – among them Adam Faith and top union leader Bill Morris – for every five acceptances. And, of these acceptances, at least two or three will sadly call it off on the day, due to unforeseen circumstances. If you can afford it, is is well worth paying your guests to come – but do agree a rate beforehand, haggling on the doorstep can cause embarrassment. In my experience, a party never really gets going without guests – however bubbly the hostess and tasty the 'eats'.

SMALL TALK. Deploying small talk effectively is an important social skill which is part of networking and the art of making friends. Almost anything can be a subject for small talk. These are some of my favourite opening conversational gambits – and, remember, they've earned me a prized database of up to 16,000 friends!

● "Call me nuts, but I always think that wine is best drunk out of a glass! But do tell me – are you one of those fascinating people who prefer it from a cup? They say that in some parts of the world the natives still press the grapes with their feet, can you believe it!!!"

● "My favourite colour is green – but then my friends tell me I'm a true eccentric, bless them! Tell me, do you have a favourite colour – and, if so, what is it?"

● "It's delightfully soft underfoot, isn't it? Tell me, would you call this soft, furry floor-covering a carpet? You would! I was right first time! And do you like carpets –or do you favour a more manageable flooring solution, such as highly polished wood, or even linoleum?"

● "I don't know if any of our fellow guests are pet-owners. I'm not, at present, though I had a dog when I was a girl. Tragically, it died. You don't have a handkerchief, do you? I couldn't borrow it, could I? Forgive me, I'm making a silly fool of myself. Oh, you're being so kind to a total stranger. I feel as though we've known each other for years. Something tells me we're going to be the very bestest of friends. May I put your name on my network database for future use in my private and professional lives? Do you know Sue Lawley and Baroness Mallalieu? Oh, but you must meet them – you'd adore each other. Tuesday week any good for you?"

HOW TO MINGLE. Parties are for fun. But when to join a particular group and how long to stay before you leave it is always a difficult judgement. Stay thirty seconds too long, and you're in grave danger of attracting looks-to-kill. No one likes a long-stayer. On the other hand, stay thirty seconds too short, and your high-profile fellow guests will consider you unforgivably rude and delete you from their network databases. Experience as one of London's most glittering and well-loved society networkers has taught me that two minutes forty-five seconds is the correct length of time to mingle in any new group of people before moving swiftly on. And remember – there's no such thing as a stranger, only a new friend who may come in useful.

THINGS TO AVOID. ***If someone dies***, delete them from your database. No one enjoys mingling with a dead person they hardly know. If the invitation has already been sent out, be sure to switch your seating plan. I've known parties that have been ruined by the presence of a corpse at one end of the table, tragically competing for attention with a well-known face, such as TV's Rory Bremner or David Milliband, head of No. 10's Policy Unit.

If you are throwing a fork supper, be sure to provide your guests with food. A fork on its own is all very well, and can even be decorative – but experienced guests will expect something to eat too.

When serving yoghurt or a cream-based dessert, remember to provide a bowl or a plate – and a spoon too. Many guests find it hard to eat yoghurt or cream-based desserts with their hands.

Never let your guests sit down. Once they do, they may refuse to budge and never go, even though you have turned all the lights off and locked the drinks cabinet. Remove all chairs and sofas beforehand. If the elderly and disabled really must sit down, your or your staff should direct them to an area of floor beneath a large, well-covered table, well out of sight of the movers and shakers.

No party should last longer than two hours. Two hours is plenty enough time to extract everything you want from your guests. So as a rough measure stop serving drinks at 7.45, start placing people's coats in their arms at 7.52, sound an alarm at 7.54 and, if they are still there at 8.02 ask your husband to mingle among the dribs-and-drabs with a cattle prod.

Make your objection to petty pilfering crystal clear prior to admittance. No top-flight society hostess likes to see that favourite item of china or that much-loved piece of crockery disappear forever in the poacher's pocket of a notoriously light-fingered guest. Solution? Place an official notice on the door to your salon alerting guests to the news that thieves will be prosecuted. And why not employ a plain-clothes detective to mingle with your guests? Payment is generally on conviction, or on apprehension, according to prior agreement.

Enjoy!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

ROSEDROP WAS A BIT UNCOMMUNICATIVE WHEN I SPOKE TO HER...
SHE'S AT THAT AWKWARD AGE, BARRY. CONVERSATION'S LIKE GETTING BLOOD OUT OF A STONE...
NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. WE ALL GO THROUGH IT, EH?
ABSOLUTELY, GARY.
I WAS VERY AWKWARD MYSELF WHEN I WAS YOUNGER.
YEAH?
I ONCE DID AN ENTIRE CHAT SHOW SAYING ONLY 'YES' AND 'NO'.
I REMEMBER. ASPEL WASN'T IT?

Literary Review

Old Bayley

Widower's House
John Bayley
(Duckworth, £16.99)

WIDOWER'S House is the third of John Bayley's books to deal with his relationship to the late Iris Murdoch. In the two and a half years since the enterprise began — shortly before Murdoch's death in February 1999 — informed critical opinion has been steadily revising its early judgements.

With *Iris: A Memoir* (1998) the pundits were unanimous: she was a genius; he was a saint. By the time *Iris and the Friends* rolled along in 1999, the pundits were turning faintly restive: she was a genius, but, er, couldn't one have too much of all this stuff? Now, with volume number three crowding out the bookstands and the pages of the *Daily Telegraph*, critical murmurings are swelling on the evening breeze.

The original question set to exercise any reader of this "memoir" would be this: what is John Bayley's motive in producing these books in which his late wife becomes less and less of a presence and in this final tranche is elbowed aside by two well-meaning but tiresome women who clearly have their eye on her husband's well-being and – lawks! – maybe a bit more besides?

Now, however, that modest enquiry has been set to one side by a much more fundamental doubt: is any of it true anyway? Judging by last weekend's flurry of press revelations, the existence of "Margot" and "Mella" — both of whom have their wicked way with this support-stockinged sex God — is fairly problematic. In the *Sunday Times*, for example, Prof Bayley could be found claiming that he had made them up as a means of providing "a form of consolation for me at a bad time". The next day's *Telegraph* interview — which one imagines to have been prompted by a stiff conversation with a lawyer — had him blathering about composite characters and things being real on the one hand and "somewhat unreal" on the other hand. God knows what the old boy thinks he did or what sort of jape he believes himself to have concocted, but if I were his publishers, messrs Duckworth, I'd be anxiously checking the veracity clause in the serialisation contract.

The sordid details are these. Margot, an old friend similarly bereaved of her other half, cooks him unwanted casseroles which Bayley surreptitiously stows in his trouser pocket, invites him to stay at her house in Norfolk and climbs mountainously into bed with him. Mella, a mysterious and elusive graduate student who tells stretchers about her personal life (the ex-husband and child turn out to be fictitious — as she well may be herself) "came up and kissed me, and then got straight into bed and pulled the duvet up over her head".) Our man tolerates these advances ("It was obvious what I had to do, nor, on the whole, did I mind doing it") while wondering what the temptress will make of his grubby underwear.

This, by the way, is the former Warton Professor of English Literature, so in between are digressions about literature (Lord David Cecil and other colleagues), some warmed-up revelations from the 1994 Booker Prize, whose judging panel Bayley chaired, and a visit which he and his wife paid to Moscow in 1993 in connection with the first Russian Booker award. The house gets burgled, which he rather welcomes as the stolen oak chest got in the way of the window.

All of this is set down in a tone of absolute, look-at-me-doddering-about artlessness, which in the end simply jangles on the nerves. It is not that these ruminations, confessions and possible fabrications are especially embarrassing, or tactless; they are merely tedious. Not only did Bayley lose a valuable oak chest and a rather nice Windsor chair during these passages in his life, apparently, he also lost his judgement.

Ultimately the book has — and I don't decently know how to put this — a faintly sinister air. This is reinforced by the cover photograph of an aged goblin clad in a pair of purple loon pants staring wickedly up from his garden chair.

And what I feel about him has undergone a 180 degree turn. Up until last weekend I disliked him for peddling what I assumed to be the truth. Now I dislike him for peddling what I fear to be lies.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ ANYONE remember Virginia Andrews, that reliable 80s best-seller, author of *The Flowers In The Attic*, *Secrets of the Morning* and a great deal else? Well, on the evidence of the bookstores, Virginia is back with a bang.

Lightning Strikes is just out in hardback (Simon & Schuster, £16.99) while there's a fat paperback, *Rain* (Pocket Books £5.99) simultaneously propping up the paperback shelves.

All this is very odd, as Ms Andrews died more than a decade ago. Even odder is a biographical note claiming that this celebrated lady scrivener "is" — not was — a worldwide bestselling author. A registered trademark sign flits about here and there but nowhere in either of the books is there the slightest indication that they aren't by a living writer.

In fact this darling little exercise in misrepresentation is the latest move in a long-running saga. When Ms Andrews died, her family consoled themselves with the thought that there was a hefty cargo of left-overs in the bottom drawer. Once this had been published, they then turned up some story outlines which teams of nimble ghostwriters were ordered to knock into plausible representations of the real thing.

Marketed as "the new Virginia Andrews" back in the early 90s, these fell foul of the office of fair trading (OFT) and had to be repackaged with a full explanation of how the things came to be written.

There was even a minor transatlantic publishing row, with Simon & Schuster in the US opting to remain silent on the question of the author's actual existence (they are less scrupulous about these things in the States) while HarperCollins in the UK eventually stepped down as publisher on legal grounds.

The upshot is that the late Miss A is now published by S&S on both sides of the pond. Or rather some books written by other people under her name are.

■ HODDER md Martin Neild went on the record in the *Indescribably-boring on Sunday* a couple of weeks ago bemoaning what he called a "feeding frenzy" when it comes to the amounts of money lashed out speculatively on authors. "We are going through a spiral of very high advances," he wailed.

There's no doubting that Neild's right. As an illustration, the *Sindie* listed a few obscenely-remunerated authors whose works hit the bookshops to monumental apathy, including *Honeymoon* by Amy Jenkins.

Costing its publisher £600,000, the *Sindie* noted that *Honeymoon*'s "reviews were terrible... [and] sales were modest". Who was the publisher who did their utmost to whip up a frenzy? Er, Hodder, headed by

Neild, who last year leapt gallantly to Jenkins' defence, asserting that the book would make "a publishing profit".

Evidently, his optimism has not been justified.

■ WHILE it was still operating, mind, body and spirit publisher Element made much of its touchy-feely, spiritual credentials. But since its collapse last year it has emerged that the firm wasn't so high-minded that it couldn't screw its authors.

When the firm fell into receivership, the choicer books on the list were sold to HarperCollins, with Chrysalis taking its pick of the rest. Both republished the new acquisitions under their own imprints. The deals were trumpeted as being about as good as the poor, hard-done-by writers could expect in the circumstances. However, what of the rest, who didn't make the grade in the eyes of the asset strippers? Most of their books were pulped or dumped in skips.

Still, it's not all doom and gloom. At least HarpicCollins and Chrysalis did well out of it, as did Element bosses David Alexander and Michael Mann, who have surfaced as consultants, the former landing a lucrative contract with Random House.

■ THE ex-Faber supremo, now *Observer* literary editor Robert McCrum returned to form on 25 February in a soft-ball interview with Faber author Hanif Kureishi.

"Is it a burden or a pleasure to be an unofficial spokesperson for a generation of British Asian writers?" was one of the tougher questions.

Then, on 4 March, McCrummy gave the full treatment to PD James, who is published by...Faber. Finally, on 11 March, Faber author Adam Phillips contributed the lead review – a rave about *Grammars of Creation* by George Steiner, who is not only a Faber author, but a regular Observer critic.

'Bookworm'

IN THE BACK

MAN IN THE EYE: CHAI PATEL

"NEW" Labour's favourite private healthcare boss, Dr Chai Patel CBE, has faced a dilemma ever since he was appointed to health secretary Alan Milburn's older people taskforce last October.

Dr Patel's little problem is how to reconcile his ambition to turn Westminster Health Care, the company he took over in 1999, into a highly profitable business which he can float and sell for over £1bn, with his government advisory role forging proposals for the National Service Framework (NSF) on how to give elderly people the best deal in terms of state-funded care.

Dr Patel has managed to make healthcare glamorous... for those on the providing end at least. Last summer, Westminster acquired that well-known refuge of the rich and famous, the Priory group. According to the *Health Service Journal*, which recently featured Dr Patel in its guide to healthcare's most influential people, he is also the man credited with the idea of transferring elderly people into private nursing homes to free up NHS beds.

In some of Westminster's homes, however, Dr Patel's forward-looking philosophies are not working. At the Thistle Hill nursing home in Knaresborough, near Harrogate, a special unit for 22 mentally-ill elderly patients, the Beech Unit, is to be shut after more than a year of critical inspection reports by the registration and inspection unit of the North Yorkshire health authority. These highlighted problems with the level of skill of staff, health and safety issues, lack of supervision and problems with the medication of patients.

In April 2000 officials from the inspection unit met Dr Patel and he agreed with their concerns. Despite the repeated warnings, however, little or nothing has been done to improve matters, and following an inspection by the health authority on 9 February, Westminster has announced that the unit will close on 9 April. This news has caused great distress to residents, some of whom are extremely vulnerable, and to their relatives. As there are no other places available for such patients in Harrogate, they will almost certainly be forced to move to homes elsewhere in the region or even further afield, making it difficult for families to visit.

At least Dr Patel will soon have the opportunity to answer some of the questions raised by relatives and concerned local authorities. Just four days before the Beech unit is due to shut, he is speaking at a conference on the implementation of the NSF which is being held in, of all places, Harrogate.

EDS they win...

ONE keen observer of the judicial review of the IR35 tax currently underway at the high court is sure to be the *Eye's* favourite IT company, EDS.

The case questions the legality of the tax, which penalises contractors who trade as one-person consultancy firms, and has been brought by the Professional Contractors' Group (PCG), a body representing some 12,000 of the skilled technology contractors, engineers and others affected.

It is estimated that in all 90,000 contractors have been hit by the measure which forces them to pay higher tax and national insurance for any job lasting more than three months, and thereby subjecting them to the same tax regime as full-time employees without any of the benefits.

One key argument put by the PCG's counsel, Gerald Barling QC, to Mr Justice Michael Burton, who is hearing the case, concerns competition. While the Inland Revenue claims that contractors are only competing with the permanent employees of service companies and in-house IT departments, Barling argued in court that contractors are actually small businesses competing with large service providers – such as EDS.

The PCG has long said that the effect of the tax will be to drive contractors to work overseas. Paymaster general Dawn Primarolo, who has spearheaded the implementation of IR35, vigorously denies this; but the PCG maintains that if contractors have delayed upping sticks, it is only because they are awaiting the outcome of the judicial review.

Dawn Primarolo

In a marvellous example of joined-up government, the department for education and employment (DfEE) recently announced a new fast-track work permit scheme to make it easier for IT firms to recruit cheaper overseas workers, presumably to replace home-grown contractors. This fast track scheme was one of the recommendations made by the DfEE's information technology, communications and electronic (ITCE) skills strategy group in a report published in 1999 which suggested: "Where appropriate, specific ITCE occupations should be designated as skills shortage areas for the purpose of the administration of the work permit system, to ease the process of recruiting staff from abroad."

The chair of the strategy group, made up of businessmen and academics, is Alan Stevens of, er, EDS. Other companies represented include Microsoft, Motorola, IBM and BT. The Inland Revenue's insistence upon a tax which benefits EDS among others is surely unrelated to its ten-year "strategic partnership" with the IT giant?

The Inland Revenue's defence team, meanwhile, includes Rabinder Singh, who together with the prime minister's wife Cherie Booth set up Matrix Chambers last year to specialise in the new human rights act. No doubt Mr Singh is defending the human rights of large technology companies such as EDS to boost their profits still further when the opposition is taxed out of the market.

PARTNERS IN CRIME

EDUCATION secretary David Blunkett (*right*) has announced a £1.8m "partnership" to bring private firms into local education authorities (LEAs). Blunkett's exciting new "partners" include:

● **Accountants and management consultants:** Clearly the education secretary thinks accountancy is the best qualification for running schools. He has handed LEAs to Capita in North Somerset; PriceWaterhouse in three London boroughs (Hammersmith, Tower Hamlets & Kensington); KPMG in Havering; and Deloitte and Touche in Essex.

Deloitte has already contributed to local government by cocking up housing benefit collection systems via its pisspoor subsidiary, CSL.

● **Prison operators:** Serco will get its claws into two LEAs in Tower Hamlets and Essex. In Tower Hamlets the LEA will "explore the benefits of being treated as an operational unit of Serco, subject to its business disciplines and management systems".

● **Builders:** In the Wirral Jarvis plc includes "the use of private sector expertise in improving schools assets" and "facilities management". Jarvis is a building firm already making several bids to build and run schools. Since 1999 it has been prosecuted three times by the health and safety executive (HSE), with fines of £7,000, £200,000 and £300,000 for accidents on the railway. It was one of the firms maintaining the track at Hatfield.

● **Newsagents:** In Thurrock the LEA is offering "information services" to pupils, which sounds so much more exciting than boring old fashioned education, with the help of that leading scholastic firm, WH Smith.

● **Arms firms:** Most incredibly, in Hampshire the LEA is being teamed with Vosper Thorneycroft to run the "school improvement services". Yes, the election of a Labour government has resulted in a Tory-run arms firm controlling local schools. Vosper is chaired by Tory Lord Wakeham and has tried to get into state education once before. When the Tories sold off the careers education service, Vosper took over a few regional services.

The national audit office (NAO) found that the privatisation had cost millions but failed to improve careers guidance in any way. At the time a certain David Blunkett attacked the Tories on the issue, proclaiming: "How can the secretary of state commend her changes to the careers service when they have led to fragmentation and to privatisation?" (27 Mar 1996). That same David Blunkett is now going a step further by handing central LEA functions to the firm. "Fragmentation and privatisation" are now "innovation and partnership".

CANNON PLODDER

MORE on foreign secretary Robin Cook's "ethical" arms sales policy and his lambasting by the joint select committee on arms exports (see *Eyes passim*).

Along with Morocco, the select committee looked at arms sales to Israel, Taiwan and China. But there are plenty of other areas where UK arms exports are a concern and where MPs didn't have time to investigate. Like the **Ukraine,** for example, where riot police use teargas and truncheons to suppress demonstrations against President Leonid Kuchma, whose regime is accused of being involved in the murder of journalist Georgy Gongadze. (His headless corpse was found outside Kiev last year.)

If Kuchma ever needs heavier weapons to deter his demonstrators, he might find useful the projectile launchers, small arms, small arms ammunition and telescopic sights exported by the UK under Cook's "ethical" licences a couple of years ago.

If attacking protesters isn't reason enough to stop selling to Ukraine, in parliament before Christmas former foreign minister Peter Hain highlighted another reason while outlining the general difficulty of curbing the global flow of small arms. "One of the problems is that the worst offenders, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Moldova, are supplying small arms – especially to Africa," he said. All the more reason not to sell weapons to Ukraine in the first place, surely?

In **Ecuador,** an uprising last month of impoverished, largely indigenous people met the arrival of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation. The Ecuadorians blockaded the streets, often using wooden spears. The army fired teargas and live bullets at them and killed eight. Under "ethical" licence, Britain has exported semi-automatic pistols, projectile launcher parts, sniper rifles and half a million pounds of high tech kit to the Ecuadorian army.

In **Peru,** where president Alberto Fujimori is being investigated for the execution of 14 Marxist rebels and his former intelligence chief Vladimero Montesinos is accused of selling arms to Colombian guerrillas and brokering Jordanian arms deals, both men have fled the country.

Cook, meanwhile, is rather proud of his work in Peru, noting in his annual "human rights report" that the foreign office put £37,000 towards the country's "Human Rights Ombudsman" to help develop "best practice" and to set up a series of regional forums on human rights. For good measure he also licensed the export of assault rifles, submachine guns, sniper rifles, telescopic sights and night vision goggle parts to the jolly regime there.

MMR: now for the triple jump

THE Scottish parliament looks set to rattle the cages of complacent health ministers and officials this week with a report recommending that parents should *not* be forced to give children the controversial triple MMR vaccine and should be allowed instead to opt for single vaccines.

This will be the first big dent in the official hard line that MMR is the safest way to protect children and single doses are not an option. If Scottish parents are allowed to choose single vaccines, it will be impossible to stop the practice elsewhere in the UK.

Meanwhile, three new pieces of research looking at vaccines and autism or both are likely to force even more parents away from the measles, mumps and rubella jab.

The first, by researchers at the Royal Free Hospital in London, has found that some children with regressive autism suffer a unique leaky gut syndrome, not found in non-autistic children or children with known forms of gut and bowel disorder.

The suggestion arising from the study of 68 children over a two-year period is that an immune process is damaging the gut and that further investigation should focus on researching immune reactions in the gut, rather then concentrating – as most autism research currently is – on genetics.

Elsewhere, in the *Journal of Paediatrics*, other work suggests that such leaky guts allow partially digested food to enter the bloodstream and toxic material to cross the blood-brain barrier – which is akin to giving the brain a huge shot of morphine. Yet, more work in the US, Japan and the UK which has found a rogue measles virus in the blood or guts of many of the children with both autism and the rare gut disorder suggests there may be a link with vaccination.

The second new study, by two researchers at the University of Minnesota, did explore immune reactions in children with regressive autism. Although only a small study of 35 autistic children were compared with 27 "normal" children, they found the autistic children's immune systems acted abnormally when subjected to outside triggers like vaccines, virus and food. In other words, in a number of vulnerable children a vaccine could send their immune system into overdrive. "These results may partly explain apparent association between the onset of regression/autistic behaviour and immunisation in these children," say the researchers.

There are still no signs, however, that health officials in Britain are changing their minds. Only last month the committee on the safety of medicines reiterated support for MMR, and in an attempt to influence the wavering Scottish parliamentarians, six Scottish medical institutions issued a press release reporting that the "overwhelming weight of scientific evidence on MMR, including the world's largest study of the vaccine, reaffirms its safety".

As the *Eye* detailed in January, the world's biggest study (carried out in Finland) does no such thing. And nor do several other studies cited by the committee.

Perhaps health officials should listen to the American Institute of Medicine. Research carried out for it by George Washington University looked at 60 scientific papers covering MMR, measles vaccine, autism or bowel disease to see if they supported the concerns first raised here by Andrew Wakefield at the Royal Free in 1998 of a possible link between MMR and rare regressive autism and gut disease (see *Eyes passim*).

The American researchers looked at papers cited by the UK health officials and ministers to rubbish Dr Wakefield — and decided that they do not help the debate one way or another.

They conclude: "Furthermore, the studies commonly cited in response to Wakefield typically address either other vaccines or other outcomes or both, so even if well done would not really refute the Wakefield hypothesis. Thus... the evidence is inadequate to accept or reject a causal relationship between MMR and autism." So far.

PRISONS

1. HITTING ROCK RAMSBOTHAM

LAST week's damning report into Winson Green prison in Birmingham is but the first of a series which will pitch the chief inspector of prisons Sir David Ramsbotham into headlong confrontation with home secretary Jack Straw.

"Rambo" is soon to publish his report into Stoke Heath young offenders' unit, which will make the "appalling" Birmingham look like a model of civility. He has found that both staff and inmates at Stoke Heath, which holds nearly 500 teenagers and young men, "share a bullying culture". In one year there were a staggering 1,000 recorded incidents of injury – seven times the rate at Winson Green, says the probation officers' union, Napo.

The Stoke Heath report is said to be scathing of the lack of an effective anti-bullying strategy that leaves many of its young inmates living in a climate of fear. Many resort to "cutting-up" and self-harm. Rambo has also found that "demoralised staff" are ill-equipped to deal with their adolescent charges and that many are simply locked up all day with little or no education or activity.

The damning verdict on Stoke Heath will be followed by another report into the "hell-hole" that is the Portland young offender unit in Dorset. Rambo is furious that, like Birmingham, not enough has changed since he last reported on its squalor, violence and "lack of vision". Portland is already subject of a police investigation into a series of alleged assaults by staff on inmates. Rambo himself identified the brutal culture there as the "Portland Way", where "fear was a feature of control". Several staff have been suspended.

Jack Straw's response to Rambo's criticisms has been robust. He has refused to renew his contract, no doubt hoping to replace him this summer with a patsy.

2. HOLLOWAY, HOLLOW WORDS

THE chronic failure of prison managers to halt suicides in custody has been highlighted again by the case of Cheryl Hartman.

The 20 year old, who had serious alcohol and mental health problems, was serving nine months for assault and affray in Holloway prison in north London when she hanged herself last June.

Even though she suffered severe anxiety, had been seen by a prison psychiatrist and doctor and was waiting for an urgent appointment with an outside psychiatrist, she was still able to hang herself with her dressing gown cord from a curtain rail while fellow inmates were at a church service.

This month an inquest jury returned an "open" verdict on Cheryl after hearing of a staggering catalogue of failure at the country's biggest women's jail, where Cheryl's was the ninth death in the last few years. There have been repeated calls for change from coroners, the chief inspector of prisons, the local board of visitors and even from the prison service's own critical internal inquiry reports. But to no avail.

For 11 weeks Cheryl was treated on the jail's psychiatric wing before being transferred to a more "normal" location with other young offenders on D wing. Here she was bullied and assaulted, and teamed up with another disturbed and vulnerable inmate. Together they discussed killing themselves and practised fashioning nooses in the toilet block — a spare one was found by police in Cheryl's cell after her death.

Though Cheryl told at least three staff she was harbouring feelings of suicide or self-harm it was decided not to fill out a suicide risk form. The reasoning was that she was in a dormitory with other inmates who could watch her; that her "bullies" were being dealt with and that staff, too were watching her.

In contravention of prison service recommendations, none of the three staff concerned had ever had suicide awareness training. One even told the inquest that in all her 11 years at the jail, the first awareness training she had received was five weeks ago. So not only was Cheryl not recorded as a "risk", she was even allowed to keep items like her dressing gown belt. To protect her from her bullies, she was then moved to a single cell. And it was here that she was able to suspend herself from an old curtain rail in exactly the same way as another Holloway prisoner, 35-year-old Sharon Peters, had killed herself a few months earlier.

Following Sharon Peters' death there was an instruction that such curtain rails should be taken down. But this was not done on the young offenders' wing... with inevitable, tragic consequences.

CAPE CRUSADERS

THE thousands of ill and dying victims of Cape plc's filthy asbestos mining activities in South Africa during apartheid (see *Eyes passim*) had been hoping that the so-called new "ethical" shareholders in the British multinational would exert pressure on the company to settle their claims for compensation.

Indeed, 18 months ago they had particular hopes that Norwich Union, which boasted that it took environmental issues into account when making commercial decisions, would either pull out in protest or demand justice for the black workers. After all, Cape paid £30m to settle claims brought by British workers with asbestosis and lung cancers, and working conditions in the UK were far better than in South Africa.

Extracting blue asbestos fibre

Imagine their dismay, then, now that they have learnt the Norwich Union's merger last year with CGU to form CGNU, the world's sixth largest insurance company, means Cape's shareholders and insurers are one and the same – a double reason not to pay up. The former CGU is the key insurer in the frame for the Cape case.

Stephen Pain, corporate affairs director for CGNU, told the *Eye*: "Of course we are aware of the seriousness of the case. We believe the best way to ensure socially responsible investment is through continuous constructive dialogue with the companies in which we invest." Of CGNU's role as insurer, he said investment and insurance were completely separate and added: "It is our policy never to discuss cover or claims with which we may or may not be involved."

Norwich Union's former chairman, George Paul, was a little more forthcoming about Cape plc when he was trying to persuade shareholders to vote for the merger with CGU. He wrote to one: "CGU carried technical provision against its general business and associated undertakings totalling £17.9b and for this reason the CGU directors consider that any costs arising from these claims are not likely to have a material impact on the financial position of CGU group."

Seems they can well afford to pay up then – which makes Cape's continuing and immensely costly high court fight all the more obscene.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

JUST how much of a rescue was provided to Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group by last year's deal with Singapore Airlines is demonstrated by the much delayed accounts for the bearded wonder's troubled high street operations.

Eye readers will recall Branson's "can't pay, won't pay"-style approach to the record companies that were owed up to £80m by his Our Price and Megastore chains. They will also remember that the 1999 accounts for the stores were only signed by the auditors hours after Branson had collected a net £400m from the £600m sale of 49 percent of Virgin Atlantic Airways. Now they can see why.

VOP Holdings, which now owns the Our Price and Megastore chains, lost more than £126m in the year to January 2000 on sales of just under £500m. The previous year had registered a loss of under £3m on higher sales equivalent to £562m for a year. This exceeds even Branson's own worst estimates last year of £80m-£100m.

In a typically Bransonesque understatement, this massive loss is described by the directors – who funnily enough do not include their employer, the grinning pullover – as "a significant erosion in the company's profitability".

Again in typical Branson style, where good news is always trumpeted ahead of achievement and bad news delayed and never publicised, these figures only became publicly available earlier this month and were signed by the auditors 13 months after the year end. That way the past can always be said to be irrelevant because now everything is better and brighter.

No doubt the defeated national lottery bid was responsible for some if not all of this delay as it no doubt ensured the Virgin Atlantic results were not filed until six months after they were signed. Virgin Atlantic's profits also went into a nosedive from £105m to £42.6m for the year to April 2000. As the airline is the profit engine that powers the Virgin empire, the seriousness of the situation caused by the high street losses is all too apparent.

Retail profits in fact disappeared at all but the grossest of operating levels before expenses. No wonder Virgin needed a massive cash transfusion. And, as almost 10 years ago when Branson also faced a cash crisis, that could only come from selling part of the crown jewels. Then it was the music business; last year it was the airline.

The VOP directors blame intense competition in the CD market, falling margins and the cost of financing the ill-fated buy-back of W.H.Smith's 75 percent stake in the retail stores for £145m in 1998. Some £100m of that finance was expensive short term money predicated on a sale of the Our Price chain that never came.

The shops lost £21.5m before interest charges of £27m were added. But the biggest bill was for writing £52m off the value of the Our Price business. In fact VOP has provided a total of £72m against the book value of Our Price virtually writing off its entire investment. Not surprising. Further exceptional write-offs, mostly off stocks of CDs etc, took the total set against profits to £80m.

So serious was the situation that the VOP accounts had to be prepared on a going concern basis reliant on the promise from Virgin Group Investments, the offshore parent company controlled by Branson family trusts, to support the company "for at least the next 12 months". As part of that deal a shelf company Ivanco (No 2) took over all the bank debt – £176m at the year end – a year ago. VOP already owed £86m to other Virgin companies. Trade creditors, mainly the record companies, were owed another £81m at the year end.

Having taken out the bankers, Ivanco (No 2) has then written off £83m of the debt it assumed and turned another £34m into shares. But that internal switch from one Virgin pocket to another still left Branson out of the money he repaid the bankers, presumably from the Singapore cash.

Despite rebranding 97 of the 200-plus Our Price shops as V Shops, VOP still expects the year that ended last January to be difficult with more expensive write offs. And Virgin Atlantic too is expected to have another tough year. Not though that such problems will halt the relentless Branson good news publicity machine.

MOHAMED Fayed is another man with a debt problem but he has solved it by borrowing more. News last month that the phoney pharaoh had raised £350m from the Royal Bank of Scotland by mortgaging Harrods was greeted as if this was all available for spending on Fulham's bid to stay in the premiership after the likely division one champions arrive there next season. But this Max Clifford-orchestrated spin ignored the minor matter of Fayed's existing substantial borrowings. At January 2000 Harrods Holdings, which owns the store, owed £285m which was due to be repaid no later than February 2002.

There was also a facility from HSBC for another £140m. If HSBC is now also out of the picture, there may not be unlimited funds for Fayed to play pharaohs with after the loan has been repaid plus the working capital facility. And that is before the Inland Revenue finishes questioning exactly how Fayed does fund Fulham, *Punch* and the other non-Harrods items, as well as his lifestyle on his declared UK income. Questions the *Eye* had been raising for a long time before the taxman reopened the Fayed file last year after his admissions of needing £100,000 a week "walking round money" during the Hamilton trial...

HOPEFULLY Tory treasurer Lord Ashcroft managed to complete the planned sale of one million Tyco International shares before the price was clobbered by news of its takeover of financial services group CIT. The shares fell last week from around $53 to below $45 largely on the news. Ashcroft filed his intention to sell on 6 February. Such large deals – CIT will cost Tyco $9bn – always hit the bidder's price. Something Ashcroft knows all about from his ADT days. Thankfully as a non-executive director he would not have been aware of the CIT deal at the time he decided to sell. And anyway, what's $8m to a billionaire?

THE ever-expanding ripples from the City Slickers scandal continue to trouble insiders at brokers Redmayne Bentley who dealt for the two disgraced Mirror tipsters. The latest concern are suggestions that some at Redmaynes not only "piggy-backed" on the Slickers' deals but sold out ahead of them after the tips were published.

Meanwhile it is reassuring to read that Trinity *Mirror* chief executive Philip Graf considers *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan's share-dealing was "a foolish pattern not a greedy pattern" (*Guardian*, March 19). With such naivety no wonder the newspapers have risen up against government plans to force journalists to reveal if they, their colleagues or families own shares they write about.

An *Eye* reader meanwhile points out the dangers of following the investment wisdom of those financial hacks whom we must assume do not back their own tips. John Waples of the *Sunset Times* twice last year recommended motor dealers D.C. Cook – in April at 12p and in June at 16.5p – after the shares had fallen from 24p. In January the heavily loss-making motor dealer went into receivership. The shares were suspended at 9p. This development did not attract any comment from Waples or the *Sunday Times*.

THE City Police is justifiably known for its expertise in fraud. However, the rest of the organisation seems to leave a lot to be desired. The most recent evaluation of the Square Mile's finest found that it failed 12 of 17 performance indicators. These included a failure to answer calls quickly, a poor detection rate and evidence of arrogance and poor management. Clearly little has improved since the riots two years ago exposed weaknesses in the force that could make absorption by the Metropolitan Police ever more likely.

'Slicker'

Stock Horror

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THE DIRECTORS

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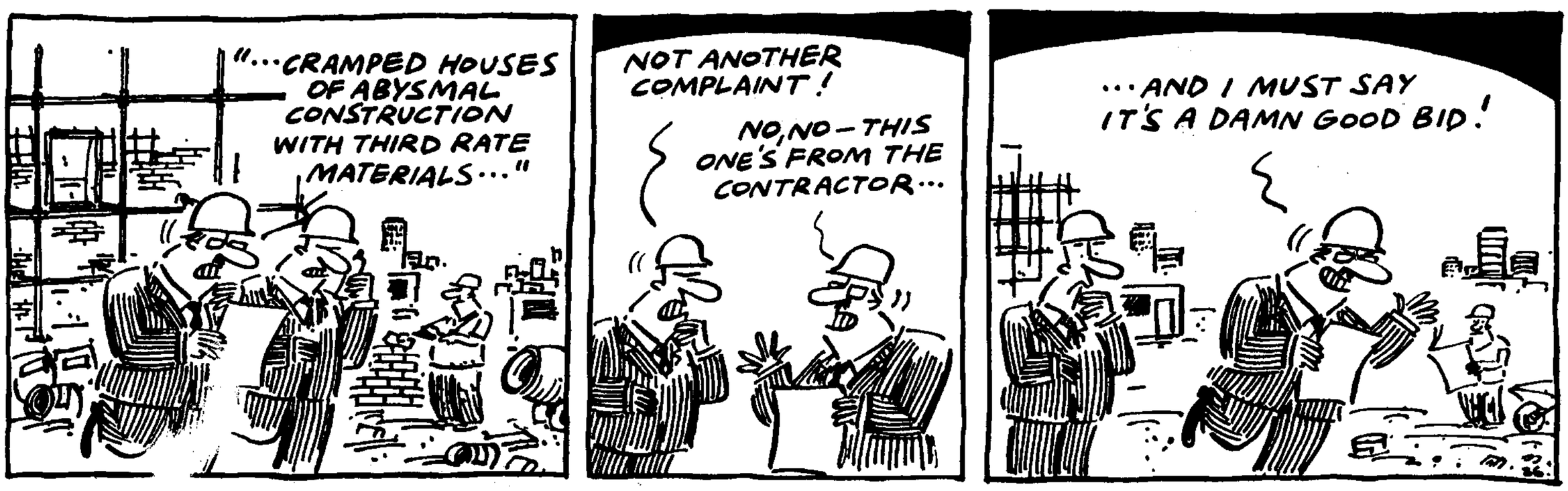
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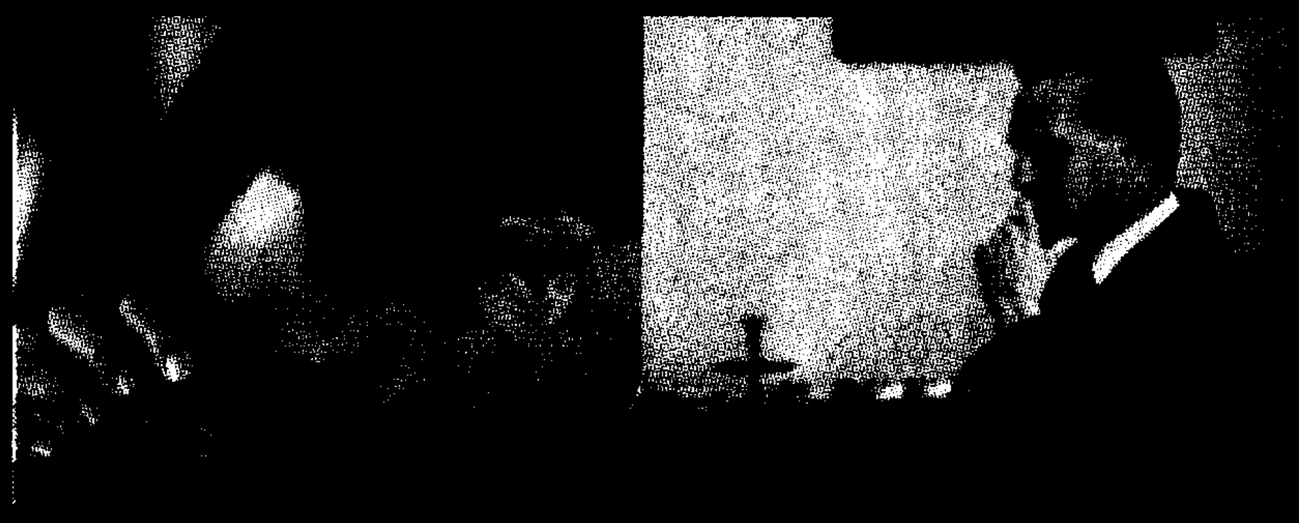

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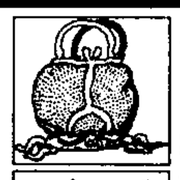

A selection of cartoons, illustrations and animated cels can be found on the **Cartoon Gallery Website**, from **Chris Riddell** to **Steve Bell, Alex** to **Appleby, Honeysett** to **Husband** and **McLachlan** to **Matt.**

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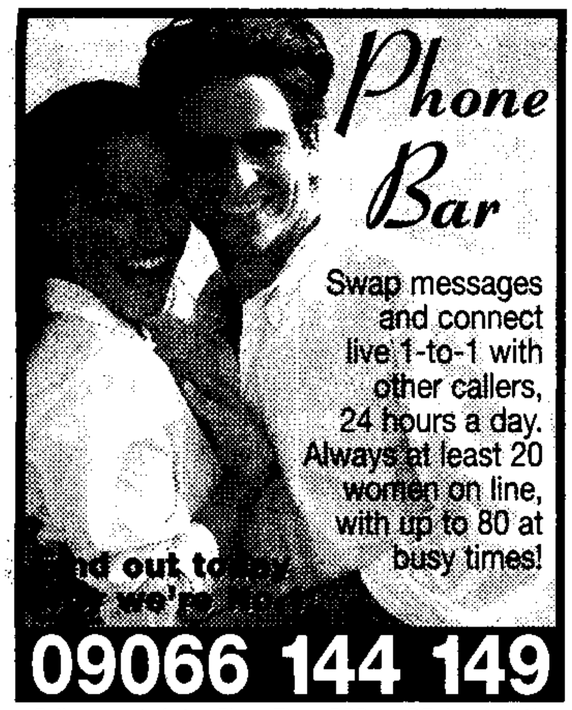
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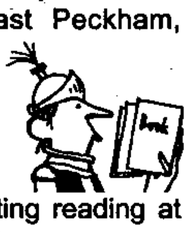

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YOUNG MALE just landed dream job in City needs £500 for deposit on flat and suit. Can you help? 20-60-88, 00237485.

DISABLED GUY with long tale of woe needs your cash help to make blues go. Write me a cheque to the bank below or make my day with a sweet Giro. Halifax Plc, 11-03-73, 00004350.

£20,000 could turn my life around: pay debts and fund teacher training course and associated costs of childcare and transport. Please help. Clydesdale 82-69-32, 10080787.

BRILLIANT MARINE biologist needs £500 for Irish expedition. Barclays 20-68-10, 20902535 – E-mail dizzolla@hotmail.com

HELP BRING the romance back into air-travel. Money needed to rekindle passion of flying boat travel. LLOYDS TSB 30-96-06 0448541 – jasonahood@hotmail.com

LOVE TO BUY McLAREN F1 – donations gratefully received – 401817 42070618.

MAKE AN OLD MAN happy. She didn't – she left me broke. Please help. Thank you. Nationwide number: 0598-616606441.

FLORENCE KNIGHTINGALE, 45, paying half salary for rent. Urgently needs help to get on mortgage ladder. GIRO 283176806, sort code 72-60-00.

I HAVE Multiple Sclerosis – desperately need £4000 for electric wheelchair. Please help. Barclays 20-06-72, Account 30280518.

NICHOLA, 20 YEAR OLD chronic psoriasis sufferer since jilted. Unemployable, depressed – would like to try Dead Sea as last resort. Please help me. Lloyds/TSB 87-37-06, 77181560.

PENNILESS postgraduate countertenor seeks donations or employment opportunities to fund course. Any help appreciated, any offers considered! Barclays: 20-60-58 acc: 20744433 – Byrd_william@hotmail.com

FINANCE NEEDED. In return will successfully help you to achieve your greatest ambition – 020 8374 3924.

HELP! Cannot bear to see elderly grandfather live out remaining days in ghastly home, need help with extortionate fees to make his last years happy. THANKYOU – 40-02-26, 11424041.

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NEED £25,000 to get life back on track. Anything over will be invested for my daughters. Co-operative 08-90-28 14213320. My daughters thank you.

STUPID MISTAKE so owe £2000. Can't tell family. Lesson Learned. Can pay you back slowly. Nationwide 07 01 16 33229856. Box 1624.

SINGLE GRADUATE MUM seeks re-entry into workforce. Needs financial help for childcare and student debt – mother@goodcause.co.uk – HSBC 40-18-17, 82277867.

HEART IN GREECE – sad in Northeast – £20K and I'm on my way – HSBC 403610 51046462.

MANIC DEPRESSIVE – life ruined by NHS psychiatry. Please help. Nationwide 07-00-30, 52540791.

OLD DOG learned new tricks. Wasted 4K on IT retraining, told "You don't have enough experience" Help! (With work OR cash). Thanks. RBoS 83-21-42 00160822 or Box 1124.

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HELP TO FUND an operation for a developing country child I have sponsored. Beyond my finances as £10,000 needed. TSB 77-14-02, 29882660.

STRUGGLING COUPLE with Down's Syndrome daughter need to raise funds for operation abroad. Any amount appreciated. Halifax 11-07-51, 00577944. Thank you.

NEED £1000 for university tuition fees. Natwest S/C 600509, Acc. 90536851.

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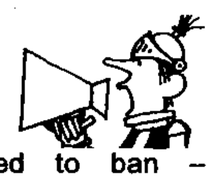

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GENTLEMAN, 81 – literary, interesting, – seeks companionable, undemanding wench. Cotswolds/Anywhere. Box 0524.

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